the weekly
Standard

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OBAMA THE WEAK
FRED BARNES

Here the People Rule

The town halls of August

MARY KATHARINE HAM
MATTHEW CONTINETTI

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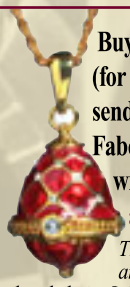

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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Artists to the Rescue!

Patrick Courrielche works in the arts in Los Angeles, and last month he was invited to join in a conference call arranged by the National Endowment for the Arts. The invitation asked the 75 participants to deploy their artistic talents to advance the Obama administration's "recovery agenda." And what's that? You know: "health care, energy and environment, safety and security, education, community renewal." All that stuff.

Courrielche (who is quick to say he's no right-winger) was creeped out by the call and wrote about it on the blog *Big Hollywood*, where it got lots of attention. "Is building a message distribution network, for matters other than increasing access to the arts and arts education, the role of the National Endowment for the Arts?" he asks. The answer is no, as the endowment's charter makes clear.

Many people are upset about the phone call and the larger, purely partisan campaign it was meant to encourage, and of course they're right to object. Along with similar initiatives by the administration to use the power of government to rally support for its political agenda—a list that could arguably include the Education Department's Obama-worshipping "teacher's guide" for the president's speech to school children this week—it's another example of the overreach that messianic political enthusiasts are often guilty of.

Yet in the past few months we've also seen the Obamatards display astonishing ineptitude in rallying the troops, now that the glitter of campaigning has given way to the drudgery of actually doing something.

Yes, they're misspending money that isn't theirs for purposes that aren't proper, and they should knock it off. Really, though, the spectacle is more comical than sinister. Watching left-wing arts bureaucrats organize performance artists, hip-hoppers, multimedia visionaries, shamans, videographers, aboriginal dance troupes, poetry slam prizewinners, YouTube Riefenstahls, oud players, and street mimes into a political lobby for health care reform is a bit like watching Spanky and Our Gang choreograph the Little Rascals in *Swan Lake*. Let us savor these moments. ♦

Sticks and Stones . . .

Elsewhere in this issue Mary Katharine Ham describes how some of the Obamacare protesters at congressional town hall meetings have appropriated—with tongues set firmly in cheek—the nasty terms that the media and others have employed to describe them ("right-wing terrorist," "fear-monger," etc.). There seems to be no word in the English language for the practice of adopting a term of abuse as one's own, but especially in politics, it's an old and honored technique.

The Scrapbook is reminded that, in 1948, the left-wing Labour politician Aneurin Bevan—one of the architects of the British welfare state, by the way, including the National Health Service—explained in a speech that "no amount of cajolery, and no attempts at ethical or social seduction, can eradicate from my heart a deep burning hatred for the Tory Party. So far as I am concerned they are lower than vermin."

British Conservatives at the time might well have reacted with shocked indignation—as many American conservatives have to Obama adviser Van Jones's assertion that "Republicans are assholes"—but, instead, they founded hundreds of Vermin Clubs throughout the United Kingdom, which served to strengthen and unify their party and, not least, make Bevan look petty and vindictive and supremely foolish.

The Scrapbook is not suggesting that critics of Obamacare wear "right-wing terrorist" as a badge of pride. But it is pertinent to know which side in this debate employs irony and wit, and which side practices (to resurrect another historic phrase) the politics of personal destruction. ♦

A PR Tsunami

Last December, the Brazilian ad agency DDB Brasil created an ad for the World Wildlife Fund's Brazilian unit. The ad showed a swarm of commercial airliners converging on lower Manhattan and the World Trade Center. The copy on the ad read: "The tsunami killed 100 times more people than 9/11. The planet is brutally powerful. Respect it. Preserve it."

The ad went on to win an award in New York in May, and then, last week, finally made its way on to the Internet (including our website). The reactions were as you would expect: Bloggers wanted to know why the WWF was exploiting 9/11 in its advertising, why the group was casting Planet Earth as a terrorist, etc.

The WWF sprang into action to defend its good name. An army of eco-flacks was deployed to beat back the story. Instead of an abject apology for an inexcusable lapse in taste, though, they went on offense. The ad was neither authorized nor approved by the WWF, they said; the group was unaware even of its existence. The Weekly Standard received two phone calls demanding such corrections, which means dozens of such calls must have been placed. The *New York Daily News* was actually convinced to publish a story explaining that the group was "appalled" by the "tasteless 9/11 terror ad" supposedly produced by unsupervised rogue

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designers at the ad agency. The WWF even took to Twitter, barraging critics with links to statements denying every element of the story. How could an ad that was created for the WWF but never approved or authorized win an award without the WWF knowing about it?

Well, it couldn't. After 24 hours of damage control, the WWF released a statement conceding that, yes, they had approved the ad. Yes, the ad had run in a Brazilian newspaper. Yes, it was all true—but WWF assured us they "deeply regret that the information we provided, while given in good faith, may not have been completely accurate."

The WWF should add its PR experts to the endangered species list. ♦

Letters They Didn't Publish

Scrapbook friend Ross Terrill, the distinguished Sinologist, has shared with us an excellent letter he sent to the editor of the *Boston Globe*, which, alas, they did not publish. Happily, we have the space that the *Globe* editors couldn't spare and so reproduce it here:

Dear Editor,

The *Globe* did a fine job during the 1960s civil rights struggle, but your current view of diversity is pinched. A 8/14/09 story asked "how to preserve diversity in the nation's newsrooms." The only criterion given for diversity was race. The same day we discover under the heading "Deep, Diverse Field" for the City Council election, among 13 challengers "6 are black, 2 are Latino, and 1 is Vietnamese-American." But you fail to broach the most important diversity in a democracy: competition of diverse political standpoints.

Front page the same day you raised Massachusetts's probable loss of a congressional seat because of "Warmer climates with less expensive housing" in the south. Nothing about the anti-business policies of a one-party Democrat state with rising taxes driving business, jobs, and people out. Diversity anyone?

For the *Globe*, array of color is great; array of political and economic ideas, well, not so great. John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty* said truth, to be kept bright, needs encounter with error. Even the *Globe*'s truth and the Democrats' truth needs it. A diversity of color alone tells us nothing about excellence or initiative.

I've met the *Globe*'s bias on diversity of political view first-hand. For decades when left-of-center, I was welcomed as a contributor of scores of articles to all sections of the paper. Now right-of-center, I am blackballed. Nothing accepted, nothing even acknowledged. I get the point. Some kinds of diversity are more equal than others. I hope the *Globe* survives. Being less one-eyed might help.

Ross Terrill

Sentences We Didn't Finish

"The Bush administration declared war on the whole idea of civil rights, in a way that no administration of either party has since the passage of the nation's civil rights laws in the 1960s. It put a far-right ideologue in a top position at the . . . " (*New York Times* editorial, September 2). ♦

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Casual

Fit To Be Tied

In an idle moment in an otherwise indolent life, I recently counted my neckties. I have, I am slightly embarrassed to report, 86 of them, some purchased as long ago as the late 1970s. The preponderance are bow ties, though I've bought a few brightly colored knit four-in-hand ties in recent years from a Charleston haberdasher called Ben Silver. I also have two four-in-hand ties owned by the poet John Frederick Nims and given to me by his widow, one of which has small red octopuses against a background of forest green. The whimsicality of it is, for those who knew John, very Nimsian.

Eighty-six is a lot of neckties. Since they do not take up much room, I have not felt the need to winnow them, tossing away the more hopeless. None, so far as I know, is stained, faded, or frayed; nor is any of them outlandish. Each of these neckties represents an aesthetic choice on my part. Each tie, I must have thought at the time I acquired it, would make me more dashing, dignified, dandaical, who knows what. As I gaze upon them now, I wonder whether I am likely to wear even half these neckties ever again.

The fact is that the necktie may one day before long go the way of spats, becoming a laughable anachronism. Should this happen in my lifetime, I won't be among those laughing, even though I, too, find myself wearing neckties less and less. Putting on a necktie is not part of my everyday dress now that I no longer go to a regular job. I wear neckties only if I am invited to give a talk or lecture or to go to a dinner party or one of the few remaining restaurants where neckties are understood to be *de rigueur*.

Lawyers still wear neckties in court; so do most physicians when seeing patients. Businessmen seem to be wearing them less and less; casual Friday is increasingly becoming casual everyday. A not uncommon photograph in the *New York Times* business section or the *Wall Street Journal* shows two powerful CEOs upon the merger of their companies, both with open collars.

MATT COLLINS

When I began teaching at Northwestern, in 1973, then in my mid-30s, I was faced with two choices: neckties or not, calling students by their first names or not. I went for the more formal option in both cases and never regretted it. My wearing a jacket and tie to class put some useful distance between my students and me, and also gave the impression, or so I liked to believe, that in a crunch I might have a chance of finding work elsewhere.

Until the 1980s, most even moderately expensive restaurants assumed that male customers would wear neckties. This was also true of private clubs. I used to be a member of the Tavern Club in Chicago, and when one night I invited the film director Edward Zwick to meet me there for dinner, Zwick, originally a Chicagoan but long a habitué of Los Angeles, showed up in a black silk shirt open at the neck and a black unconstructed jacket. The Tavern Club made him put on a necktie, of which they kept a few in reserve, which he did in amused good spirits. Not many years later, the Tavern Club dropped its necktie rule. I am not sure that a restaurant or club today could stay in business if it insisted all its male customers wear neckties.

The West Coast has never been necktie friendly. Neither has Israel, a country I have long assumed has only enough neckties for the male cabinet officers of the government in power. The tieless movement has now swept up orchestra conductors, many of whom have turned in their grand white-tie-and-tails for one or another black trousers and tunic get-up. Toscanini, I daresay, would not have approved; Furtwängler would have tossed his cookies.

The only defense for the necktie is tradition, not, in our time, an easy defense to make. I recall an older salesman at Brooks Brothers, a man who had devoted his life to being well turned out and helping his customers do likewise, telling me with chagrin that his 26-year-old grandson did not know how to tie a necktie. His sigh after reporting this reverberated around the shop.

The two movie stars who wore neckties best were Fred Astaire and Cary Grant. They knew that a bit of color at the throat brightens up the countenance of an older player, and they knew which colors did the job most elegantly. Churchill wins in the bow tie division of this competition with his perpetual dark blue bow tie with small white dots. What we can learn from these gents is to button our shirt collars, tie a bit of silk at our necks with a careful crisp knot, and move out smartly.

Joseph Epstein

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the weekly Standard

People Power

Congress returns this week, and here's hoping that its members, Democrats in particular, learned a little something from this summer's town hall meetings. The lesson to be drawn from these occasionally raucous events is that America is on the verge of—or already knee-deep in—one of those moments that periodically roil the country and rearrange our preconceived notions about public life. And not a moment too soon.

Popular outbursts serve as a check on, and corrective to, our elites' behavior. The people know things the elites forget or don't want to remember. The political class is supposed to serve the people, not the other way around. As Gerald Ford said after assuming the presidency on August 9, 1974, "Here the people rule."

THOMAS FLUHARTY

For a while now, the message from Washington has been that we know what's good for the public, whether the public likes it or not. One after another, both parties have attempted to foist a series of grand reforms on a skeptical populace—in areas ranging from Social Security and immigration to energy and health care. Politicians have made decisions affecting millions of lives without accountability and oversight. The upshot has been more government, more debt, and—coming soon to a 1040 form near you—more taxes. No wonder the public is anxious.

It should hardly come as a surprise that the public views American elites with suspicion and disdain. Ordinary Americans have a point when they assign blame for the current mess to Wall Street CEOs, federal regulators, corrupt politicians, and gullible reporters. When Americans look at the economic landscape, they see dismal growth, high unemployment, and large deficits. But when they listen to the president and Congress, they hear that "stimulus"—borrowing ever more from tomorrow to spend today—will work like some kind of magic cure. They hear that this perilous moment is the time to build a "new foundation" with even more expenditures and taxes through "cap-and-trade" and Obamacare. It's as if spending and debt are no problem; as if it's fine that the federal government—which failed in its fundamental duties to build guardrails for the financial system—owns large chunks of that system; as if the political, financial, and think-tank elites have proven themselves worthy of the public's trust.

Two issues are at the center of the present discontent. The first is the state of public finances. The activists and other concerned citizens who showed up at the first tea parties last spring weren't protesting Obamacare (yet). They were protesting Obama's bailouts, budgets, and deficits. Obama's expansion of the state is an offense to liberty, but also to equity. People understand that as the government grows, they will have less opportunity to dispose of their income as they see fit. So the deficit is more than a number or a "structural imbalance." It's a symbol of unrestrained and irresponsible governance.

The second thing that is motivating the new public outcry is a sense of estrangement from political decisionmaking. The worry that Obamacare will result in fewer personal choices and more government fiat is legitimate. That's what Obamacare is set up to do. The debate is not merely a matter of which inputs will produce—voilà!—the desired outcomes, as the Obamacrats think. It's about freedom and responsibility. It's about a family's ability to control its fate, an individual's ability to shape his nation's future.

Rather than examine the reasoning and emotions behind the public expressions of concern, however, the president and his allies in Congress and the media have dismissed the opposition as crazy, misinformed, cynical, and artificial. To the contrary: In 1985, Irving Kristol wrote that the public activism of the Reagan area "is no kind of blind rebellion against good constitutional government. It is rather an effort to bring our governing elites to their senses." That's a fair description, it seems to us, of the public activism on display at town hall meetings across the country over the last month.

As for the elites, especially the liberal elite: They remain deaf, dumb, and blind.

—Matthew Continetti

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Obama the Weak

The perils of a sycophantic administration.

BY FRED BARNES

There are three President Obamas. There's the Obama who defers, the one who dithers, and the one who's out of touch. The Obama presidencies have one thing in common. They're all weak.

Obama is a great talker. He's also what used to be called a "press hound." That's a politician who can't go a single day without lavish attention from the media. But talking and availability aren't the same as leading. Nearly eight months into his presidency, Obama has yet to offer strong leadership, on anything.

What's more, Obama is a liberal who's surrounded himself with liberals. His weakness makes his liberal domestic policies more vulnerable than they otherwise would be. For a moment after Obama's inauguration, Republicans were fearful of him. They quickly found that opposing him is safe and fruitful.

But presidential weakness is dangerous in foreign affairs. Obama has been deferential to adversaries and tough on allies. He's pretended problems with Russia are as much America's fault as Russia's, taken human rights off the table with China, begged Iran to talk with him. This hasn't been productive. He's come down hard on Israel and Honduras. That hasn't been productive either.

Obama's tendency to defer has been most dramatic in his relationship with congressional Democrats, perhaps the most unswervingly liberal and partisan group in the nation. "If the president leads the way, his party can hardly resist him," Woodrow Wilson wrote. Obama has flipped that notion. His party in Congress leads, and he hardly resists at all.

The deference started early.

Last December, weeks before the president took office, House speaker Nancy Pelosi set sharp limits on the role of Obama and his aides on Capitol Hill. A few days later, Democrats ignored the Obama team's desire for a tax credit for small businesses in the "stimulus" bill. It might have attracted Republican support and fulfilled the president's promise to be bipartisan.

Post-inauguration, Senate and House Democrats embarrassed the new president by sending him an omnibus spending bill studded with thousands of earmarks. Though he'd criticized earmarks, Obama knuckled under and signed the measure. On the cap-and-trade environmental legislation, House Democrats threw out Obama's cherished plan to raise revenue by auctioning off emission rights. They decided to give most of the rights away, mainly to political allies.

And after Obama reached a deal with pharmaceutical companies—they pledged $80 billion in cut-rate drugs for seniors in exchange for favored treatment in health care legislation—congressional leaders dismissed the deal as not binding on them. This prompted Obama to declare it nonbinding on him, too.

His biggest concession to congressional Democrats, though, has been to let them write the legislation on his three biggest initiatives: the stimulus, health care reform, and cap and trade. I can't think of another president—not one of the previous 43—who willingly yielded so much power to Congress.

Presidential scholar Charles Dunn of Regent University characterizes Obama as "a leader who's not leading. He's like a coach of a football team who says to go out and call your own plays while I watch from the sidelines. So things are chaotic."

Presidential dithering has abetted the chaos. When Obama addresses Congress and the nation this week, he

JASON SEILER

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intends to spell out "in clear, understandable terms what our administration wants to happen with regard to health care," according to Vice President Biden. Well, it's about time. The president has been *unclear* for months as four congressional committees approved health care bills in his name. Only now, weeks after his own deadline for final passage, is Obama prepared to reveal his bottom line on Obamacare—that is, unless he balks.

The president has dithered in another sense, too, actually hiding his views on matters inside his administration. As the war in Afghanistan has worsened, Obama has said practically nothing on the subject. (He did call it "a war of necessity.") When Attorney General Eric Holder decided to hire a special prosecutor to investigate CIA officials who interrogated captured terrorists—a step the president had earlier opposed—the White House claimed it was solely Holder's call.

But is Obama really out of touch with the country? Yes, indeed, and it's self-inflicted. In *The Age of Reagan*, his new book on the Reagan presidency, Steven Hayward argues that administrations rife with factional infighting over policies are more successful than what he calls "sycophantic" administrations. "Fractiousness in an administration is a sign of health," Hayward writes, citing Reagan's feuding but successful White House. He thinks serious disputes over issues lead to better policies.

Maybe they do. I suspect they have a more important value. Different factions help an administration stay attuned to grass-roots opinion outside Washington in a way the Obama White House hasn't been. Obama and his advisers, for example, were the last to learn that the proposed government-run health insurance plan is a deal-killer for many millions of Americans.

By "sycophantic," Hayward means an administration with one view of the big issues, little dissent, and an inflated sense of the president's appeal. That's the Obama administration: pretty much all liberalism, all Obama, all the time. The one real disagreement among the president's top advisers is whether to deploy more troops to Afghanistan. And this quarrel has only recently erupted.

What the Obama team doesn't understand is the limit of the president's appeal. His base is the liberal wing of the Democratic party, which is less than one-quarter of the voting public. Yet his aides believe he's able to captivate and convince a far larger audience. That he's been failing at this for months hasn't stopped the White House from trotting the president out again and again with nothing new to say, as if it's the only option. Perhaps, in a sycophantic administration, it is. ♦

What the CIA Documents Show

Yes, Virginia, enhanced interrogation works.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

It's not very often that there is agreement between the leadership of the American Civil Liberties Union and officers at the Central Intelligence Agency. The CIA jealously guards the nation's most highly classified secrets; the ACLU is a crusader for government transparency. CIA operatives risked their lives to capture al Qaeda terrorists; the ACLU would risk ours to set them free. The CIA is dedicated to defending America; the ACLU has spent millions defending al Qaeda.

But a growing number of CIA officials—both current and former—are in agreement right now with the ACLU about some of the most-sensitive information the U.S. government has obtained in the eight-year war on terror.

The ACLU has been fighting in the courts for years for the release of a wide range of documents related to the CIA's interrogation programs. It was in response to ACLU lawsuits that in April the Justice Department released four memos written by lawyers in the Bush Justice Department. And the Obama administration's recent release of the 2004 CIA inspector general's report on the interrogation of terror suspects also came in response to an ACLU Freedom of Information Act request. CIA director Leon Panetta and a small army of agency lawyers fought vigorously against releasing any documents, but they lost those battles to Attorney General Eric Holder and his boss, the president.

But now there's a push from within the CIA to declassify and release even more information about the CIA's enhanced interrogation program. CIA officers believe that making public additional details will end the debate over the efficacy of the program, and so they are pushing to have hundreds of pages of highly classified documents declassified and released, including a detailed response to the IG report, two internal reviews of the interrogation program undertaken by respected national security experts, and perhaps even redacted versions of the raw interrogation logs.

For years, Bush administration critics demanded the release of the May 2004 report by CIA inspector general John Helgerson. The 109-page review of the enhanced interrogation program was supposed to demonstrate conclusively that abuse was routine and that enhanced inter-

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rogation techniques (EITs) are ineffective. MSNBC's Rachel Maddow called the report the "Big Kahuna." The *Washington Post*'s WhoRunsGov blog took to calling the IG report the "holy grail" and said that staffers for congressional Democrats told him it would "detail torture in unprecedented detail" and "cast doubt on the claim that torture works."

Helgerson was well known inside the CIA as a critic of the detention program, and his report reflects those views. But while Helgerson sought to avoid declaring that the EITs worked—writing that measuring their effectiveness was a "challenge"—the weight of the evidence he presented points directly to that conclusion.

Two examples. The report noted of Abd al Rahim al Nashiri, mastermind of the USS *Cole* attack: "Following the use of EITs, he provided information about his most current operational planning and [redacted] as opposed to the historical information he provided before the use of EITs." And Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the man behind the 9/11 attacks, "provided only a few intelligence reports prior to the use of the waterboard," reports that were largely "outdated, inaccurate or incomplete." After the application of EITs, the IG report notes KSM became "the most prolific" and "preeminent" source of intelligence on al Qaeda, revealing names and locations of al Qaeda leaders and details of coming plots.

In his 2004 report, Helgerson recommended bringing in an outside group to review the program. CIA director George Tenet delegated the task to the directorate of operations. Concerned about sharing details of the top secret program, officials "outside" of the interrogation program but still inside the CIA were selected to do the review. The team's findings are known inside the agency as the "rebuttal," and they argue that the program worked even more unambiguously than the IG report suggested.

In 2005, Porter Goss, who had replaced Tenet as CIA director, ordered a second independent assessment of the program. He sought to put together a small, bipartisan team of national security experts from outside of the CIA. More than one person, including former Republican senator Warren Rudman, turned down the request to serve. (The reasons given most often were lack of time and subject-matter expertise, but several intelligence officials suspect the real reason for the reluctance was a fear of having to conclude, in writing, that the controversial program was a success.)

The two men who finally agreed to conduct the review are both respected national security heavyweights. John Hamre was deputy secretary of defense under Bill Clinton from 1997-2000 and currently serves as chairman of the Defense Policy Board. Gardner Peckham, a veteran of Capitol Hill, worked on foreign policy and national security issues for high-ranking congressional Republicans, including Henry Hyde and Newt Gingrich, and as the top legislative liaison for Secretary of State James Baker and the director of legislative affairs at the National Security Council under Brent Scowcroft.

> CIA operatives risked their lives to capture al Qaeda terrorists; the ACLU would risk ours to set them free. The CIA is dedicated to defending America; the ACLU has spent millions defending al Qaeda.

They were read into the program in the spring of 2005, and the two spent the summer poring over mountains of information: analytical products from the Counterterrorism Center, legal briefs from the Justice Department and the CIA's general counsel, memos about the program's challenges and successes, top secret cables from the field, even the highly classified raw interrogation logs with details about the application of EITs and the intelligence they yielded. Only the detainees themselves were off-limits to Hamre and Peckham.

The two wrote separate reports evaluating the program, focusing on one question at the center of the debate over enhanced interrogation: Did it work?

Officials familiar with the reports say that Hamre's study was heavily analytical, data-driven, and cautious. These sources say that while Hamre stopped short of endorsing the interrogation techniques and wondered whether the information could have been extracted in other ways, he confirmed that the EITs elicited valuable information.

Peckham's review of the materials found that the program was well run and successful. The use of enhanced interrogation techniques generated a large volume of high-quality information, Peckham concluded. It was the use of EITs that led directly to this massive body of fresh intelligence—information that almost certainly prevented attacks and saved lives.

The most controversial materials being sought today in the declassification push are the logs compiled by interrogators as they sought to extract information from detainees. Those in favor of declassifying them believe they demonstrate—in the day-by-day accounting of the application of the techniques and the intelligence generated—just how valuable the enhanced interrogations were. (The logs would have to be heavily redacted to protect the identities of those involved in the program and the foreign intelligence services that helped the CIA.)

But other supporters of the EIT program are urging caution about what material is released. They say that the cost of winning the political argument would be too high.

"If you give the logs themselves, what a horrible precedent we have set," says Mike Rogers, a Republican representative from Michigan and former FBI special agent. "You can't just tell your enemies how you

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do what you do. What we think we know and what we know are different things. Confirmation is intelligence."

That is the official position of the CIA, too (if not that of many of the agency's officers). In a 33-page filing on August 31 that seeks to block ACLU efforts to require the release of additional information related to the interrogation program, Wendy Hilton, a CIA classification official, argued that further disclosures would cause "exceptionally grave damage to the national security."

> The USG is aware that al Qaeda and other terrorists train in counter-interrogation methods. Public disclosure of the questioning procedures and methods used by the CIA as part of the detention program would allow al Qaeda and other terrorists to more effectively train to resist such techniques, which would result in degradation of techniques in the future. If detainees in USG custody are more fully prepared to resist interrogation, it could prevent the USG from obtaining vital intelligence that could disrupt future attacks targeting US persons and property.

Even if she's right, the argument is somewhat ironic. The Obama administration has made public hundreds of pages of documents that describe—in precise detail—the methods used to elicit information from terrorists. Didn't those previous disclosures result in the degradation of U.S. intelligence capabilities on interrogations? And the White House announced last week that future interrogations would be conducted under the guidelines of the Army Field Manual—in effect telling our enemies what we will and will not do.

And that, along with the Justice Department investigation of the CIA program, is why some intelligence professionals want more information out now. "Almost all of the good information came from waterboarding and the other EITs," says a former senior U.S. intelligence official. "Once they broke, they broke for good. And then they talked forever." ♦

NEWSCOM

Panetta's Empty Promise

The CIA won't be able to pay its operatives' legal costs.

BY JENNIFER RUBIN

CIA director Leon Panetta has had a tough year. He's lost a series of high-profile battles with his White House bosses—over releasing Bush administration enhanced interrogation memos, the naming of a special prosecutor to reinvestigate CIA operatives, and retaining the CIA's lead role in interrogating high-value terrorists. Having failed to stave off the Obama-Holder onslaught on his agency, Panetta was reduced last week to promising legal counsel for ensnared CIA employees.

But even *that* assurance is now open to debate.

In an August 24 statement Panetta declared his "primary interest—when it comes to a program that no longer exists—is to stand up for those officers who did what their country asked and who followed the legal guidance they were given. That is the president's position, too." Panetta followed up by saying the CIA would provide legal representation for those employees caught up in the special prosecutor's investigation.

But former intelligence and Justice Department officials have questioned the ability of Panetta to make good on his offer. Panetta's suggested arrangement hasn't been the way it's worked in the past. Former CIA director Michael V. Hayden told me, "What I did was make professional liability insurance available at no cost with the idea of casting a wider net. A lot of people did make use of it." A current U.S. intelligence official confirms that many employees have the insurance, but, he explains, Panetta's intention is to give "something beyond" that, including to those who did not obtain insurance or whose claims might not be covered.

Leon Panetta

That's where things get murky.

Despite multiple inquiries, the CIA would not specify what statute would allow Panetta to make this offer. As to past precedent, a U.S. intelligence official would only say, "There have been cases in the past where legal expenses have been indemnified for Agency employees." The official declined to say if this went beyond individuals' liability insurance or applied specifically to the agents implicated in the CIA inspector general's 2004 report

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on "Counterterrorism Detention and Interrogation Activities."

One former high-ranking intelligence official believes that Panetta's plan is to seek reimbursement from the Justice Department on a rolling basis for legal expenses incurred by agents, then look to liability carriers if the Justice Department is not forthcoming, and last rely on CIA funds for simple reimbursement. But a former Justice Department official notes that this "begs the question of the authority" to approve reimbursement from CIA funds for legal expenses.

Panetta's offer raises a host of questions, including who might qualify for reimbursement. The former high-ranking intelligence official asks, "Does it apply to everyone? We talk about the agents who are being investigated. But their bosses and their bosses' bosses will all be going for lawyers. They'll be asking themselves 'Did I report everything? Did I report fast enough?'"

Former Justice Department officials suggest that the Detainee Treatment Act (DTA) might cover agents' legal expenses. But that is problematic. One attorney explains that DTA protects agents if "the interrogations at issue were 'officially authorized and determined to be lawful at the time they were conducted.'" But, he notes, there is a "fair argument" here that the DTA does not afford legal protection to "interrogations that went beyond techniques approved by the Justice Department, which is what Holder claims to be focused upon." If that is so, then the DTA's provisions for legal counsel might be likewise limited. In addition, the statute might only apply to legal representation before *foreign* tribunals, not a U.S. special prosecutor's investigation.

An analysis by the Heritage Foundation suggests that Panetta may have been granted the authority in the 1949 Central Intelligence Act, which allows the director to make payments for "confidential, extraordinary, or emergency" purposes without regard to other expenditure regulations. But such an assertion of unbridled spending authority by the CIA would almost certainly invite challenge from Justice and Congress.

A former Justice Department attorney dubs this a "head scratcher," wondering where Panetta gets his authority and whether the Justice Department won't find such payments unauthorized, and, indeed, illegal. Given the fact that "DOJ jealously guards its role as the gatekeeper of federal litigation," we may, he suggests, be heading for another CIA-DOJ clash. The CIA, however, thinks this is none of the Justice Department's business. A U.S. intelligence officer says, "It's my understanding that DOJ only has to approve of reimbursement for legal expenses when they are the ones paying for it."

The toniest Washington, D.C., law firms (including Eric Holder's at the time) lined up to provide pro bono legal services to terrorists detained at Guantánamo. If these same firms would step forward to provide free legal help to CIA case officers the entire issue might be moot.

In fact, there is considerable doubt whether, if the Justice Department refuses reimbursement, the CIA can step in to pay the agents' legal bills. It has been the Civil Division of the Justice Department's historical purview, not individual agencies', to decide such issues. In particular, the division's Torts Branch decides if a government employee was acting in his official capacity, and if affording representation is "in the best interests" of the U.S. government. And former Justice attorneys find it inconceivable that one division of the Justice Department would authorize payment of defense counsel fighting off another division's investigation.

On April 16, when Holder released the enhanced interrogation memos over the CIA's objections, the Justice Department issued a statement which read, in part: "To the extent permissible under federal law, the government will also indemnify any employee for any monetary judgment or penalty ultimately imposed against him for such conduct and will provide representation in congressional investigations."

But the language refers only to *congressional* investigations. A congressional staffer with knowledge of the issue, though, speculates that Panetta is attempting to prevent Holder from "weaseling out" of an apparent offer of legal protection. He thinks Panetta is making a political rather than legal calculation: "Is Eric Holder—who already went back on his word, actually the president's word, to look forward and not backward—going to leave case officers already twisting in the wind without representation?"

The Justice Department did not respond to repeated inquiries regarding the legal authority to reimburse CIA operatives' legal expenses.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Dick Cheney and former high-ranking Justice Department officials are flummoxed by Panetta's statements. Asked in a Fox News interview about the promise to pay the agents' lawyers Cheney responded, "Well, that will be a new proposition. Always before, when we have had these criminal investigations, the fact is that the employees themselves had to pay for it."

There is of course a solution to this dilemma. The toniest Washington, D.C., law firms (including Holder's at the time) lined up to provide pro bono legal services to terrorists detained at Guantánamo. If these same firms would step forward to provide free legal help to CIA case officers the entire issue might be moot.

Meanwhile, CIA employees face a Justice Department inquest and are "lawyering up"—while being far from certain that they can rely on Panetta's promise that they will not go broke in the process. ♦

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How England Prevailed

Not with 'offshore balancing.'

BY TOM DONNELLY

In his September 1 *Washington Post* column, George Will offered a prescription for U.S. retreat from Afghanistan: "Do only what can be done from offshore, using intelligence, drones, cruise missiles, air strikes and small, potent Special Forces units, concentrating on the porous 1,500-mile border with Pakistan, a nation that actually matters." This approach has a pedigree; students of international security will recognize it as "offshore balancing."

The basic idea of "offshore balancing" is that the United States should adopt a grand strategy of husbanding its strength, concentrating on dominating the "international commons"—this used to mean ruling the waves *à la Britannia* but now also includes the air (airpower being a particularly congenial form of military power for Americans), space, and even the realm of "cyberspace"—while limiting its involvement in "continental" struggles. The continent in question was once Europe, then East Asia, but now mostly refers to the greater Middle East (although it is also true that offshore balancers are among the most eager to accommodate increasing Chinese power).

The concept is a hardy perennial in the journals specializing in such matters, most notably MIT's *International Security*, which is, in this context, the paper of record. Those with a strong tolerance for political science lingo should try Christopher Layne's 1997 article "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy." Layne argued that though bad things will happen if the United States adopts an isolationist approach, worse things will happen if we keep poking our nose in where it's not wanted.

But offshore balancing has also been a refuge for political opponents of Bush's wars: John Murtha, in his public renunciation of the Iraq war, proposed an "offshore" alternative that, depending upon who the congressman might be talking to, centered on Kuwait—not exactly "offshore"—or Diego Garcia, roughly 4,000 miles from Baghdad, offshore in spades. The Center for American Progress, John Podesta's vehicle for lefty Democrats, published a sort of what-the-congressman-meant-to-say "strategic redeployment" study, which made it clear that offshoring mostly meant coming home to the United States.

A further, cultural and aesthetic, reason for the durability of the idea of offshore balancing is that it has a distinct Anglo and maritime aroma. It's not just an idea, it's an idea that has the sound of a nifty, nautical tradition. While it's easy to see how this might appeal to some war opponents, a close look at offshoring shows that it not only results in bad strategy, but has its origins in bad history.

Let's begin with the allegedly Anglo origins in the mists of Tudor myth, the defeat of the Spanish Armada and faith in the Royal Navy's "wooden walls." On this telling, England was (and remains) an island apart from Europe, "a precious stone set in a silver sea," as Shakespeare had it. Britain became great by avoiding a "continental commitment," exploiting the maritime commons to build an empire linked by trade.

This interpretation of British strategy and imperial greatness always had strong appeal with the American cousins, but it remained for Alfred Thayer Mahan (and through him Theodore Roosevelt) to import the whole bolt of cloth to the United States. Mahan's *Influence of Sea Power Upon History* (1890) is still today an influential work of "security studies" (although he's probably more widely read in Beijing than Washington), combining familiar threads—navalism, exceptionalism, and imperialism—in a uniquely American weave.

Mahan was also a man with a narrower agenda: the "transformation" of the U.S. Navy from a coastal and commerce-raiding force into an ocean-going, blue-water, power-projection force of nature. The domestic success of the Big Navy Boys and, later, the Air Power Mafia helped to entrench further the offshore strategic rationale. Controlling-the-commons excuses us from becoming embroiled in land wars on any continent.

It's a very rousing and inspiring story. If only it were true.

First of all, it's a caricature of British strategy. As Brendan Simms of Cambridge convincingly argues in his recent epic *Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire*, the pattern of Britain's success was not in sheltering behind the Royal Navy but in maintaining—both by subsidizing allies and by directly intervening—the "liberties of Europe," the continental balance of power. The defense of the British Isles was not behind the wooden walls of her battleships but in the lowlands of Belgium and Holland. This was the "system" that sustained the Whig leadership of the 18th and early 19th century; the "defeat" described by Simms, the American Revolution, was the result of Tory rule and the embrace of pure navalism.

This Whig Way of War is the real old-spice Anglo-American legacy. Properly understood, "sea power"—the security and ability to efficiently trade upon the international com-

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mons—begins ashore. Like Britain in the Lowlands, Americans must secure the outer, continental perimeter to ensure our interests and the common interest in a stable and relatively liberal international system.

This is also the clear pattern of American strategic behavior. The story of the past century is the story of very bloody and expensive but sustained and successful interventions in Europe and East Asia. The deepening American involvement in the "greater Middle East," centered around the Persian Gulf but broadly across the region from West Africa to Southeast Asia, likewise conforms to past practice. "Offshore balancing" was given a thorough trial, from Franklin Roosevelt's agreements with Ibn Saud through the "dual containment" of the Clinton years. It failed to produce a satisfactory outcome. To be sure, we are a long way from "securing the liberties" of the region, but it would be both difficult and dangerous to renege on this continental commitment.

Thus American strategic genius consists, not as George Will (quoting de Gaulle citing Bismarck; two perhaps great but ultimately failed statesmen) would have it, in knowing when to stop. For Americans, the trick is to persevere, to occasionally regroup without retreating, and to remember that ultimate success is to be found ashore. ♦

Jump-Starting the Space Program

The profit motive would do the trick.

BY JIM PREVOR

The moon belongs to everyone
The best things in life are free,
The stars belong to everyone
They gleam there for you and me.
—From the 1927 musical *Good News*

Star-gazing may be free, but the Human Space Flight Plans Committee, a panel of luminaries and experts appointed by President Obama to assess the future of America's manned space efforts, has found that space exploration is not. The gist of the committee's imminent report: Our current levels of expenditure will not support a return to the moon, a journey to Mars, or much beyond keeping the space station operating.

This sad conclusion dovetails with recent news reports marking the 40th anniversary of man's landing on the moon. All of them noted that not much outer space exploration has occurred since the United States answered President Kennedy's famous call: "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth."

The reason little has happened since 1969 was typically reported as having something to do with the end of the Cold War. And certainly, President Kennedy wanted to show the world that the United States was number one in what he called "the battle . . . between freedom and tyranny." But few commentators asked why no other motivation for investment in space had emerged in the United States or other countries. The reason is simple: a lack of incentives.

What actually happened to space exploration is that just before the moon landing, in 1967, the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies went into force. This treaty bans the use of nuclear weapons in outer space. More relevant to the future of space exploration, it also prohibits any nation from claiming ownership of any part of outer space. The treaty states that "outer space, including the moon and other celestial bodies, is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means." And that, in a nutshell, explains why few are interested in spending money to go there.

The principal benefits from space exploration are national prestige and technological spinoffs. Thus, a rising power such as China is interested in expanding its space program. Although peaceful economic exploitation is not prohibited, in the absence of property rights a company or a country probably could not capitalize on a mineral discovery or the settlement of a planet. Further, the treaty specifies that all exploration and use of outer space "shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries, irrespective of the degree of their economic or scientific development."

On earth, there is a traditional distinction between *terra nullius*, "land belonging to no one," which can be claimed through discovery and settlement, and *res communis*, the high seas and other areas that cannot be claimed by any country. This distinction allowed Christopher Columbus, for example, to both promise much and bargain hard. He was seeking not only a western route to Asia, but also gold, territory, and commercial opportunities. Had he been barred from claiming lands and precious metals for his patrons, it is doubtful anyone would have funded his voyages—or that he would have wanted to go himself. He insisted on retaining 10 percent of the profits of the voyage, hereditary governorship of the lands he hoped to discover, and much else.

The implication is obvious. If President Obama is interested in exploration of outer space, he should call for a renegotiation of the space treaty, a

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process that might be accelerated in light of our right to withdraw from the treaty with one year's notice. The idea would be to allow free travel through outer space, much as on the high seas, but also the claiming of celestial bodies or portions thereof based on some formula. It is not in the world's interest to encourage every country to spend a fortune just to touch a planet so as to lay claim to it, but perhaps, sovereignty could be earned via actual settlement or use of a planet over a period of time.

Right now the president's space committee can only stand as a supplicant begging for funds. An article in the *St. Augustine Record* captures the mentality:

> It is up to Obama, says Marcia Smith, formerly a space expert at the Congressional Research Service and now a consultant, to decide whether human space exploration is a worthy priority or an unaffordable luxury.
>
> "Giving NASA a couple more billion dollars a year for the next 20 years isn't really going to affect the deficit that much, considering how huge the deficit is," Smith said. "So it's a matter of presidential policy and what Obama wants to do."

This is a pathetic situation. If moving into outer space could produce some return, the administration could build a business-like case for increased investment in claiming, developing, and one day settling other planets—and for acting first. Other countries would also pursue advantages in outer space, and not just the big powers. One can imagine a small, affluent, technologically advanced, and densely populated society such as the Netherlands seeing outer space as a way to expand.

In any case, the point is clear: If the incentives were strong, we would see a lot more activity in outer space and, doubtless, begin to harvest benefits from the vast universe.

And the same principle applies on earth: It is incentives that motivate those able to build companies, develop new products, and create jobs. The president should be haunted by the imperative of getting the entrepreneur who just cashed out his first company to go back and build a second. Instead, everything the president is doing is, like the space treaty, a damper on incentives. Obama doesn't praise the entrepreneur and thank him; he doesn't hold him up as a model to be emulated. He seeks to burden business people with responsibilities such as carbon cap-and-trade, and treats those who make over $250,000 a year as a mine for extraction of wealth. The president seems to be seeking to reduce both the social and economic incentives to engage in business.

We've had 40 years of lackluster efforts to explore outer space because we have a treaty that eliminated the incentives for doing so. What a loss to our country and to the world if the policies of the Obama administration should lead to decades of diminished growth because the president ignores the power of incentives to induce people to risk, to invest, to explore, in outer space and back home in America. ♦

NEWSCOM

Vladmir Putin with Vladimir Mikhailov, chief of the Russian air force, at the Moscow air show

Waiting for Putin

Moscow air show hell.

BY REUBEN F. JOHNSON

Zhukovskiy, Russia

National air shows are supposed to demonstrate what a country's industrial base and workforce can offer to foreign partners and potential customers. The need for exposure is particularly acute for the Russian aerospace industry, which has seen its foreign sales fall off in the last few years and has had almost no domestic orders or state support for its industry since the 1991 fall of the USSR.

The best shot Russia's aerospace sector gets at impressing the rest of

Reuben F. Johnson writes on aerospace and foreign affairs.

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the world occurs every odd-numbered year in August at the Moscow Aviation and Space Salon (MAKS in its Russian acronym). This year, however, it proved once again that the personal aggrandizement of former president (and now prime minister) Vladimir Putin and his ultra-paranoid security regime comes first—to the detriment of Russia's industrial and trade interests.

In 1993 when President Boris Yeltsin's Russia held the first MAKS in this formerly closed defense-industrial city southeast of Moscow, no one could believe it. Not only was the entirety of Russia's aerospace industry on display for anyone to see, touch, and photograph for the first time in history, but the event itself took place on an aerodrome that for decades had been forbidden territory for foreigners.

During the Cold War, LII, as the airbase in Zhukovskiy is known, was one of the most secret institutions in the Soviet Union, which is saying something for a regime that placed such a high value on secrecy. The first test flights of new Soviet fighters and bombers were all conducted at LII. The aerodrome was so secretive that for years the U.S. intelligence community (usually viewing the facility from several miles up via satellite imagery) did not even know its real name. They referred to it as "Ramenskoye," the name of one of the villages that adjoin the mammoth site.

The USSR is gone, but LII today is still surrounded by more barbed wire, minefields, and guard patrols than a World War II concentration camp. And this forbidding exterior was only the opening act this year in a heavily stage-managed play that left the air show attendees waiting for Putin—and simultaneously hoping he would leave MAKS as soon as possible so we could all get back to work.

In the Yeltsin years there was a concerted effort during air shows to relax the top-secret paranoia. As with most of the Soviet-era pathologies that Russia's first president tried to change, Putin and Co. managed to turn back the clock. The security services now run the air show, so much so that during Putin's opening day visit, MAKS turned into a blockaded city. No suppliers or caterers could get onto the site, so in the heat of the summer there was no water to be had and by afternoon there was no toilet paper left in the loos. Pretty much air show hell for anyone other than the prime minister and his hangers-on.

Opening day at any major aerospace expo around the world—Le Bourget (Paris), Singapore, Berlin, Dubai, etc.—almost always features a visit by a head of state who cuts the ribbon and declares the event open for business. But rather than the presence of a national leader being used to draw more attendance—as is done in the venues mentioned above—the former KGB man's visit last month was used as a reason to keep people out to the maximum extent possible. There were no press conferences—other than the one given by Putin himself—on day one. The message from Putin was not "open for business" but "closed for business as long as I am here."

Rather than the presence of a national leader being used to draw more attendance—as is done at other air shows—the former KGB man's visit last month was used as a reason to keep people out to the maximum extent possible. There were no press conferences—other than the one given by Putin.

Exhibit halls were closed and press shooed away so that the Russian potentate could have his own personal tour and not be bothered by any pesky questions or photographers. For the first time, MAKS had a fully functioning press center—except that no one but Putin and his security detail were allowed to make use of it. Moscow's influential *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (The Independent) blasted the excesses of the Vladimir Putin Show and described the atmosphere created by the VIP invasion as "an uneducated, information vacuum."

Since the first day of MAKS was a waste of time, the number of foreign journalists willing to put up with it dwindled to a small fraction of those present even a decade ago. Among other meaningless obstructions to the fourth estate was a requirement to have a permit signed by the LII base commander in order to bring a laptop computer onto the show site—something I have never seen in decades of attending similar events around the world.

But the worst blow of all was that a cornucopia of innovative new technologies that Russian enterprises had been promising for months to show at MAKS never saw the light of day. A list of 20 new aerospace systems to be revealed at the show was placed on Putin's desk for his approval. Unfortunately, he was not there to sign it because he was off surveying the damage done by the Sayano-Shushenskaya hydroelectric plant accident in southern Siberia.

The fact that Putin had to give personal permission to display these new systems lays bare the dysfunctional nature of Russia's security services. Most countries have an institutionalized export-license clearance process that never requires the signature of anyone near the head-of-state level. Also, for some reason no one could explain, Russia's president and chief executive, Dmitri Medvedev, lacked the authority to sign in Putin's absence—even though in theory he outranks him.

That left all of Russia's aerospace sector hoping to be able to show off their best and brightest—and all of us in the press wanting to write about it—waiting for Mr. Putin. But his signatures never came. Russian industry's one shot in 2009 to show the world what they can do turned out to be a blank cartridge. Come to think of it, maybe this was a perfect demonstration of what Putin's Russia has to offer its foreign business partners. ♦

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The James Buckley Scenario

New York's 23rd could elect a conservative. But the GOP hasn't nominated one. BY KENNETH TOMLINSON

A couple of weeks ago, political handicapper Charlie Cook alerted his subscribers that "the situation for President Obama and congressional Democrats has slipped completely out of control." *Politico* asserted the Cook Political Report special "should send shivers down Democratic spines."

This makes the coming special election in New York's 23rd Congressional District an important national bellwether as voters select a successor to Republican representative John McHugh, who is Obama's nominee to be secretary of the Army.

Geographically, the North Country district is one of the largest in the East, ranging from Plattsburgh on Lake Champlain over the Adirondacks to Watertown and Oswego on Lake Ontario. Population centers are scattered in five major media markets. The district twice gave narrow margins to Bush, but last year went for Obama. If Democrats face an implosion in 2010, this sort of Middle America district is precisely where that shift will manifest itself, and both national political congressional committees are mobilizing for what appears to be a major political struggle.

The White House may have chosen McHugh for the Army post because political strategists believed they could win this district. And in a page out of Rahm Emanuel's playbook, Democrats have nominated Bill Owens, a Plattsburgh lawyer whose late law partner was a Republican state senator and who himself was a registered Independent.

Kenneth Tomlinson is a former editor in chief of Reader's Digest.

The giant New York service employees union (SEIU) is lining up behind Owens because a spokesman says the union "expects" Bill Owens to "work with President Obama on health care reform." Owens's positions on topics like national health care have been nuanced, but he has pledged support for "card check," which would eliminate workers' right to vote by secret ballot on whether or not to unionize.

Doug Hoffman

JACK LADUKE / DOUGHOFFMANFORCONGRESS.COM

SEIU support is important because in the recent special election in the neighboring 20th Congressional District, the union outspent even the Democratic party to provide an upset victory to an unknown Democrat over the Republican state assembly minority leader. At one point in the campaign the Republican could not even decide whether he was for or against the Obama stimulus package.

And what are Republicans doing in the 23rd? Upstate GOP bosses (county chairmen) met behind closed doors to nominate veteran assemblywoman Dede Scozzafava of Watertown, whose record qualifies her as the most liberal Republican congressional candidate in memory. She is pro-card check, pro-abortion, and twice voted in the assembly to legalize gay marriage. She repeatedly has won the endorsement of the ACORN-backed Working Families party, sharing that party's ballot with John Kerry in 2004 and Obama last year.

In her official assembly biography, she lists herself as chief operating officer of her family-owned corporation. But now that the firm is in trouble, facing state and federal tax liens, the local press reports she says "she has nothing to do" with the company. Meanwhile, her husband is the regional president of the AFL-CIO.

National Republican leaders have been bombarded by conservative activists to force the pull back of Scozzafava's nomination. To date the National Republican Campaign Committee is stubbornly sticking with her.

But there are developments in the 23rd that may make both political party machines irrelevant.

Doug Hoffman, a native of Saranac Lake, is a self-made successful businessman and accountant with offices throughout the district. A lifelong Republican, he had never thought of becoming a political candidate. The closest he had ever been to political power was shaking hands last year with New York governor David Paterson, who was awarding a medal of heroism to Hoffman's state trooper son, shot while successfully capturing a wanted criminal.

Hoffman and his wife and children have always spent their spare time outdoors. They are skiers. (Another son was one of the youngest ever to make the U.S. ski team.) Together the family has climbed 40 of the 46 peaks in the Adirondacks.

But something happened to Hoffman as he watched the special election in the neighboring 20th District. To Hoffman, the performance of the can-

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didates perfectly exemplified the failure of national business and political leadership in America.

So when Republican chairmen announced they would select someone to run for the McHugh seat, Hoffman declared his candidacy. "If ever there was a time when we need people in Congress who can read a balance sheet, it is now," says Hoffman.

Like nine other candidates, he met with the party bosses behind closed doors to make the case for his candidacy. He learned of the Scozzafava nomination through a party press release.

In the days that followed, Hoffman was shocked to learn of Scozzafava's positions in press reports about the coming race. He called friends who put him in touch with conservative leaders, and a meeting was arranged with New York Conservative party chairman Mike Long who was in Lake Placid to watch his own son, a New York City fireman, run in the Iron Man Triathlon.

"I met [Hoffman] early in the morning," Long recalls. "I was struck by his honesty and his refreshing grasp of the issues. I didn't know they made people like this any more. I didn't try to talk him into running, but I sure didn't try to talk him out of it."

Driving back to his hotel after the meeting, Long thought to himself, "That man has a shot at being another Jim Buckley." In 1970 Buckley was elected to the U.S. Senate on the Conservative party line against two liberals, a Republican and a Democrat.

Hoffman's campaign is winning surprising respect. Reports Brian Mann on National Public Radio's North Country website: "Hoffman also brings a lot of personal wealth to the race; that's a big deal in politics. My sense is that he could serve as a spoiler in this race. . . . But I also think there is a legitimate, if still remote, chance that Hoffman could win."

When the *Adirondack Daily Enterprise* asked readers to cast votes on its website, the result was Hoffman 58 percent, Owens 23 percent, and Scozzafava 19 percent. The survey was obviously not scientific, and the Adirondacks are Hoffman's home territory, but when he tells you his life's story, it is easy to see why those who know him are so very much for him.

He and his four siblings were raised by a single mother. By age 8 he was delivering papers to help his mother pay the bills. He started pumping gas at 14. By the time he finished high school, he was a master mechanic.

He finished at the top of his high school class, but there was no family money for college. A group of local civic leaders believed in him—and raised scholarship money for him. He graduated from SUNY Plattsburgh in 1973 with a degree in accounting.

If Republicans do not accept Hoffman as their candidate, conservative leaders have an enormous stake in what happens in the 23rd. Despite Hoffman's pledge to put in at least $250,000 of his own money, fundraising for the Hoffman campaign will prove a real test of the strength of conservatives nationally.

He joined the Army reserves, got married, started a family, and went to work for Price Waterhouse. Meanwhile, he earned an MBA in finance and accounting from the University of Connecticut.

In 1977, he moved his family back to the North Country for a new job as assistant controller for the Lake Placid 1980 Olympic Organizing Committee. His first day on the job his boss quit, and at 27 he assumed the position as corporate controller, eventually overseeing a budget of $150 million and 2,500 employees as well as 6,000 volunteers.

Today, the accounting firm he heads has six offices. The Hoffman Family Enterprises he owns with his children runs a diverse group of small businesses, from construction to auto service to hospitality and tourism. His list of civic leadership positions is vast.

Mike Long is pleading with national Republican leaders to push aside Assemblywoman Scozzafava and give the GOP nomination to Hoffman. Says Long: "She symbolizes the tax-and-spend-and-earmark philosophy that has so decimated the Republican party in Congress. On the other hand, if Owens wins, it will be a huge victory for the discredited Obama White House."

If Republicans do not accept Hoffman as their candidate, state and national conservative movement leaders have an enormous stake in what happens in the 23rd. Despite Hoffman's pledge to put in at least $250,000 of his own money, fundraising for the Hoffman campaign will prove a real test of the strength of conservatives nationally. National parties can be counted on to pour huge resources into the district for the election. Can conservatives match these donations? The answer may tell us a great deal about the future of American politics. After all, Jim Buckley's Senate victory helped build conservative political credibility and was a direct forerunner to the Reagan movement.

McHugh is expected to be confirmed when Congress returns in September. Governor Paterson probably will set the special election for November 3, when only local races will be on the ballot.

A John McLaughlin poll, still closely held by the campaign, shows that Hoffman has every chance of winning the seat. In the 23rd district (which went by a narrow margin to Obama last year), 56 percent of likely voters said they wanted to elect a conservative Republican to succeed McHugh. Only 24 percent said they would vote for a Democrat. A minuscule 8 percent said they wanted a liberal Republican.

The North Country is a spectacular place to be in late summer and early fall when the beauty of the region is unimaginable. This year the North Country will be a colorful arena for politics as well. ♦

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A Tangled Webb in Burma

Born appeasing. BY MICHAEL GOLDFARB

Senator Jim Webb (D-VA), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's East Asia and Pacific Affairs subcommittee, has taken a real interest in the Obama administration's approach to dealing with Burma's military junta. Earlier this year, he placed a "hold" on the nomination of now-confirmed Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell—an uncontroversial pick with bipartisan support—that was so strong a North Korean nuclear detonation couldn't break it. According to a source familiar with the confirmation process, it was only after multiple, pleading calls from Secretary of State Clinton that Webb was finally convinced to allow the nomination to move forward in late June.

As Webb made clear at Campbell's confirmation hearing, during which he quizzed Campbell for 15 minutes on 2010 "elections" in Burma and the role of sanctions in penalizing this brutal regime, he views these planned elections as a potential opening for Burma's democracy movement, and he believes U.S. sanctions have been ineffective.

If Webb was trying to get some concession from Clinton in exchange for releasing his hold on the Campbell nomination, the evidence that he succeeded might be found in Clinton's statements a month later, when she attended the Association of Southeast Asian Nations security conference in Thailand. There Clinton made news when she talked of the possibility that the United States might "expand our relationship with Burma, including investments in Burma." This was a major shift for Clinton, who as a senator had never objected to the annual and routine reauthorization of sanctions against Burma in the Senate by unanimous consent.

So rather than take on town hall protesters in Virginia during the August recess, Webb used his break to conduct a tour of Asia, where he gained headlines for his foray into Burma or, as that country's military junta and Webb call it, Myanmar. There, Webb was the first U.S. official ever to meet with the country's reclusive supreme leader, General Than Shwe.

Jim Webb meets General Than Shwe.

REUTERS / REUTERS TV

Webb was also granted special permission to visit Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent 14 of the last 20 years confined in her home by a regime that is in a bitter fight with North Korea for the title of most repressive in the world. She is kept virtually incommunicado and was recently convicted of sheltering John Yettaw, an American who was arrested after a bizarre attempt to contact Suu Kyi by swimming to her lakefront home. This new conviction has earned Aung San Suu Kyi at least another 18 months of confinement. Webb scored a coup of sorts when Yettaw was allowed to leave the country with him.

Believing that Burma could be coaxed out of its self-imposed isolation through economic and political engagement, Webb stated in a follow-up press conference (one of at least three) that it was his "clear impression from [Suu Kyi] that she is not opposed to lifting some sanctions" and that "there would be some areas she would be willing to look at."

This statement shocked and outraged members of Burma's democracy movement, as it seemed to reflect a major shift for Suu Kyi, who is barred from meeting with anyone except her doctor and a lawyer. Suu Kyi's attorney, Nyan Win, was dispatched to get a straight answer and blasted out this reply: "She replied that she had not discussed the issue [sanctions] with anyone recently."

Did she or didn't she? Webb has been strangely quiet ever since. A press aide said Webb's comments in Burma were a "careful, respectful statement based on their conversation, and there's no need to say anything further." One Burma watcher said, however, that it was the first time in two decades that he could remember Suu Kyi issuing a statement clarifying what she said—or in this case, hadn't said.

And those "elections" Webb has so much faith in? They would take place under a "constitution" that was adopted in May 2008—just days after a cyclone that killed thousands of Burmese—and permanently enshrines military rule. According to the Burmese junta's official figures, despite the country's being devastated by the worst cyclone in its history, turnout for the 2008 constitutional referendum was 98 percent, with a whopping 93 percent in favor of the constitution.

Webb once wrote a book called *Born Fighting*. But when it comes to the long-suffering people of Burma, he doesn't seem to have much fight in him. ♦

Michael Goldfarb is online editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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The Town Halls of August

They're here, they're conservative, get used to it

By Mary Katharine Ham

It had been a rough month by the time 67-year-old Bert Stead of Redding, Calif., stepped to the microphone at an August 18 town hall meeting with Republican representative Wally Herger. It was about to get rougher.

Dissent, formerly the highest form of patriotism, had suffered a precipitous decline in repute since the beginning of the Obama administration, a decline that in August deepened into a nosedive.

Stead and the thousands of other Obamacare critics flooding town halls to make their dissent known had been called "extremist mobs" by the Democratic National Committee, pawns of the insurance industry by Senator Dick Durbin, "un-American" by Nancy Pelosi and Steny Hoyer, "brownshirts" by Representative Brian Baird of Washington, "manufactured" and "Astroturf" by White House press secretary Robert Gibbs, "evilmongers" by Senator Harry Reid, accused of "fear-mongering" by the president, and been deemed "political terrorists" by Representative Baron Hill of Indiana.

So the Redding veteran decided to say something about it. "I have been known to say things fishy," he started, as the crowd cheered his sarcastic allusion to the infamous invitation by the Obama White House ("If you get an email or see something on the web about health insurance reform that seems fishy, send it to flag@whitehouse.gov."). Stead continued: "I have been known to even attend a Redding Tea Party. . . . I wanna say that I'm a proud right-wing terrorist."

It was clear to those who have followed the debate over town halls, including most of those at Herger's event, that Stead was mocking the rhetoric of Baron Hill and the other over-the-top Democrats. Herger got the joke: He replied to Stead's speech with a smile, "Amen, God bless you. There is a great American," before speaking to his health care concerns.

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But MSNBC's Chris Matthews, a political pugilist turned punctilious scold, declared Stead's words so awful, he could not bring himself to finish the thought:

> A guy who thinks it's okay, in this day and age, to call himself a right-wing terrorist. This is the dangerous edge, in which these people, including some elected officials, are now dancing. We've been here before. Words lead to actions, words create the national mood, the mood creates a license. People take that license and use it. I'm not spelling it out any further because I don't want to.

Fellow MSNBCer Keith Olbermann took an uncharacteristically hard line on the use of sarcasm in a public forum, saying "even if he was being allegorical or hyperbolic, this is not language to bandy about." He accused Herger, who refused to apologize for the exchange, of "contributing to this climate of paranoia and violence enveloping our political system."

Liberal blogger Greg Sargent, from his perch at the *Washington Post*, bemoaned a right-wing mainstream media that excuses the flagrant use of irony by elderly veterans: "Let's face it, if a Democrat did this, there would be days of media outrage about it. Not to state the obvious or anything, but right-wing terrorists have been known to kill American citizens."

Not to state the obvious or anything, but the climate of paranoia and violence that enveloped our political system this August was largely a creation of people like Matthews and Olbermann. The edge on which we're dancing is about as dangerous as the one Ren McCormack danced on at the Beaumont prom in *Footloose*. But the newly dour John Lithgows of the left won't stand for dancing, conveniently forgetting Camp Casey, Code Pink, papier-mâché Bush effigies, assassination fantasies, Bushitlerisms, profane signage, and the vandalism and violence that marked their own dissent earlier in this decade.

Their willful mischaracterization of Stead was a fitting end to a monthlong attack on town hall protesters by the left, which began with Think Progress bloggers, MSNBC, and the DNC distorting both the provenance and content of a memo they alleged directed a national movement of con-

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Signs of contention: Protesters jostle outside an August 6 meeting in Denver featuring House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

THE DENVER POST / R.J. SANGOSTI

servatives to disrupt town hall meetings. The memo by Bob MacGuffie, a small-time conservative activist in Fairfield County, Conn., was cited as proof of a national strategy in countless media accounts. But it was distributed only to a handful of local activists, who had no connection to national conservative organizations, as alleged. Ironically, it urged using "the Alinsky playbook of which the Left is so fond"—i.e., tactics that should be familiar to the onetime Alinskyite community organizer now sitting in the Oval Office. The memo read in part:

> You need to rock-the-boat early in the Rep's presentation. Watch for an opportunity to yell out and challenge the Rep's statements early. If he blames Bush for something or offers other excuses—call him on it, yell back and have someone else follow-up with a shout-out. Don't carry on and make a scene—just short intermittent shout outs. The purpose is to make him uneasy early on and set the tone for the hall as clearly informal, and free-wheeling. . . . When called on, ask a specific prepared question that puts the onus on him to answer. . . . After the Rep answers, or more likely diverts or dodges, be prepared with a follow-up—take the initiative and you will be able to follow-up. The balance of the group should applaud when the question is asked, further putting the Rep on the defensive.

Stead was just the latest fellow unlucky enough to have his words intentionally distorted for the sin of getting involved in public debate. Before he became known as a "terrorist" on national television, Stead was known in the community as the guy astride the Honda Gold Wing he jokingly calls his "fat old man motorcycle." He rides with three veteran charity groups, raising money for homeless and elderly vets, escorting fallen vets across the country to Arlington National Cemetery, and tracking down and identifying unclaimed remains of veterans for proper military burial. There are new rules in place. To summarize: The left calls protesters "political terrorists" for mere yelling at local town halls, protesters get teed off about being called "terrorists," they satirize the idiocy of liberals by calling themselves "terrorists," and are subsequently faulted for their rhetoric by the very liberals who called them "terrorists" in the first place. Says Stead: "Why can't I use their terminology? Especially if I'm poking it back at them?"

One public calendar, compiled by RedState.com, lists more than 400 congressional town hall meetings in the month of August. It's likely not

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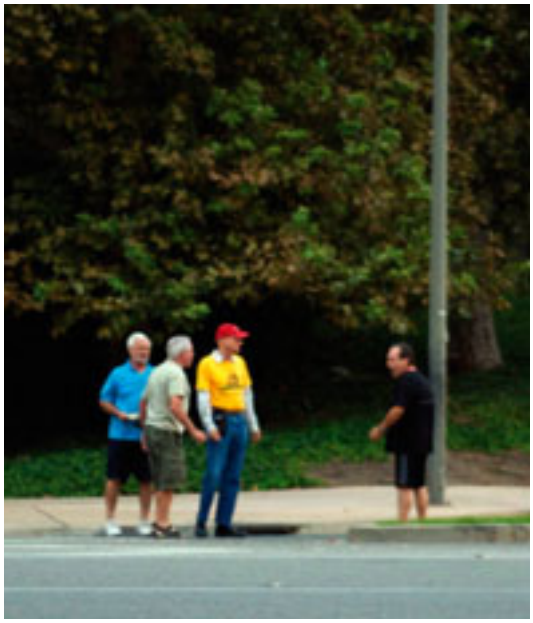
an exhaustive list, but it represents an average of more than 13 live town halls conducted per day in America during the monthlong span. At these meetings, there were fewer than ten documented incidents that could be described as violent, and most of them involved very little physical contact.

The first of these came Thursday, August 6, in Tampa and St. Louis. Liberal health care groups and the DNC had encouraged union representatives to show up in force for Obamacare. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) was an official sponsor of Representative Kathy Castor's town hall in Tampa, and at a meeting hosted by Castor's Democratic colleague Russ Carnahan in St. Louis, there was a heavy presence of attendees wearing the union's trademark purple shirts.

In Tampa, there were scuffles at the doorways as event organizers shut the doors on protesters who felt they were being unfairly boxed out, but there were no reports of charges filed or injuries—just a picture of a man with a ripped shirt. Inside the hall, a *St. Petersburg Times* photographer snapped Karen Miracle slapping Barry Osteen in the face. Miracle turned out to be the treasurer of a local Democratic club, and Osteen an Obamacare critic. Miracle claimed she was protecting her husband, with whom Osteen was arguing, but a slideshow depicts Osteen barely moving a muscle in a series of eight pictures, while Miracle and her husband move closer to him.



William Rice, third from right, shortly before the unidentified man in black bit his finger off.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

In St. Louis, several video cameras captured an altercation between Kenneth Gladney, who was selling "Don't Tread on Me" flags and buttons outside, and several purple-shirted SEIU members. Witnesses said Gladney, who is black, was addressed by an SEIU member using the "n-word," who then assaulted him. Gladney went to the hospital with minor injuries, and two SEIU members, including the local SEIU public service director Elston McCowan, were among the six people arrested in St. Louis that night. An unidentified female was arrested in connection with the same altercation. A video of the event shows her approach an Obama critic filming the Gladney incident, and then smash the camera into the filmer's face. The female assailant was later cuffed by police at the scene, also on tape. The SEIU later claimed that Gladney was the aggressor, but a video shows a different picture. Gladney is outnumbered and visibly shaken as one SEIU member yells on tape, "He attacked America!" before challenging Gladney's defenders to a fight and hurling profanities at the filmer.

When Nancy Pelosi appeared in Denver the next day, Obama supporters countered Obamacare critics with preprinted signs from Health Care for America Now and Organizing for America (the group directly descended from the Obama presidential campaign). A *Denver Post* photographer caught one of those sign-bearers, a grim-faced woman in a "HOPE" Obama shirt, ripping a homemade anti-Pelosi sign from Obama critic Kris McLay's hands as she yelled in protest. The Obama supporter declined to be identified for the photo.

At Arlen Specter's town hall on August 11, an Obamacare critic was roundly criticized as a loon for standing up and yelling at Specter about his right to "speak my mind before I leave." While he did disrupt the event, what most news accounts ignored was the escalation afterwards. An Obamacare supporter tried to manhandle the critic out of the room, which can be seen on the video shot by every network. At that point, Specter stepped in forcefully and effectively, and police closed in, calming the scene before it got out of hand.

At Representative David Price's August 13 town hall in Durham, N.C., sponsored by the state employees' union, Obama critic Gene Ellefson was punched at the beginning of the evening, surprising the relatively quiet crowd and witnesses, who said there was very little arguing leading up to the punch. "I was punched with no blood drawn by an older man who didn't like comments I made . . . to a stranger sitting nearby who was also a conservative," said Ellefson, who pressed charges and has a court date in September. "I was not belligerent and I was not shouting as I have seen in other coverage of these types of events. There was very little yelling at all at this event."

According to local media, the perpetrator seems to have been a man wearing a union sticker named Woffozo Humphries who was escorted out by police. In a video of the aftermath, a liberal audience member is heard asking, "Do you have health insurance?" to laughter, as Ellefson leaves the auditorium.

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Altercations featuring Obama supporters as the aggressors hardly fit the climate-of-fear storyline of the mainstream media, so it must have come as a relief to liberals when one of the violent, racist "teabaggers" they'd been conjuring finally seemed to show up. At a St. Louis town hall meeting on August 11 hosted by Democratic senator Claire McCaskill, a white man tore away the sign of a black woman before police stepped in and escorted both parties out. The left labeled it a hate crime, saying the poster was taken because it had Rosa Parks on it. But there was more to the story than that, and it's quite plausible his motivation wasn't racial at all. There were no signs allowed inside the auditorium. In video shot before the altercation, three women with posters enter the auditorium, marching in dramatic protest style. The crowd yells, "No signs!" several times, before McCaskill herself tells them they must put them away, at which point one of the women remains standing, seeming to taunt the crowd. When a reporter comes over to inquire about her poster, the man steps in and rips it away. He was arrested on suspicion of misdemeanor assault.

On August 25, liberals were once again delighted when the Democratic party headquarters in Denver was vandalized, attributing the 11 broken windows to efforts by the "other side" to "stir up hate." It turned out the guy doing the stirring up and breaking windows was one of their own—Maurice Schwenkler, who worked for a Democratic candidate in 2008 and is a member of Denver Bash Back, a group of "radical gay, lesbian and transgender individuals," according to the *Denver Post*. In another act of vandalism, a swastika was painted outside black Georgia Democrat David Scott's office, and attributed by the left to a racist element on the right, but police have yet to find a suspect.

In a fitting turn of events, an August 25 town hall meeting of Virginia Democrat Jim Moran also saw an altercation. Fitting because Moran may be the only congressman with an entire section of his Wikipedia page dedicated to "assaults and threats"—featuring the congressman as the perpetrator (including a 2000 dust-up with an Alexandria, Va., second-grader).

At the Moran event, an Obama critic had his shirt ripped, and an Obama supporter was punched in the eye. According to witnesses, there was a dispute over a sign. The Obama supporter grabbed the critic's shirt, ripping it, and the critic threw the first and only punch. No one was arrested, and neither man pressed charges, police said, but from my vantage point it looked like the Obama critic reacted with more force than he should have. The rest of the event, save for one yelling pro-life protester who was ejected, went very smoothly but was reported as far more chaotic than it was.

There were also two prominent reports of people carrying guns outside Obama town halls. Police told news outlets that William Kostric was within his rights to carry a holstered hand gun in New Hampshire on August 11, even at a protest. In Arizona, where there's also an open-carry law, both Obama supporters and critics were spotted with assault weapons at an August 17 rally against Obamacare in Phoenix. None of the armed protesters threatened anyone, but MSNBC's Contessa Brewer took the opportunity to crop out the face of a black man with a firearm, even while asking if all these "white people showing up with guns" evinced a dangerous "racial overtone."

Karen Miracle slapping Barry Osteen in Tampa.

CHRIS ZUPPA / ST. PETERSBURG TIMES / PSG

That's the full list of documented violence from the August meetings. In more than 400 events: one slap, one shove, three punches, two signs grabbed, one self-inflicted vandalism incident by a liberal, one unsolved vandalism incident, and one serious assault. Despite the left's insistence on the essentially barbaric nature of Obamacare critics, the video, photographic, and police report evidence is fairly clear in showing that 7 of the 10 incidents were

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perpetrated by Obama supporters and union members on Obama critics. If you add a phoned death threat to Democrat representative Brad Miller of N.C., from an Obamacare critic, the tally is 7 of 11.

And if you extend the census into September, you can add the most severe injury of all, which happened during a fight at a September 2 rally backing Obamacare in Thousand Oaks, Calif., hosted by the left-wing activist group MoveOn.org. Police have not determined who started the fight, but it ended when one of the Obamacare supporters "bit off the left pinky" of counterdemonstrator William Rice after Rice threw a punch, according to police. The Obamacare supporter, who could be charged with mayhem, left the scene before police arrived, and though Rice's missing digit was recovered, doctors were unable to reattach it because "a human bite has so much bacteria," Rice told me. Several liberal commentators took the opportunity to hail the forcible amputation as a victory of government-run medicine over a hypocritical Obama critic. Because Rice is 65, he is covered by Medicare.

All in all, a not inconsiderable amount of that "dancing on the dangerous edge" Chris Matthews bemoans is being done by the very same people who are fretting that tea partiers will destroy this once-great nation.

A not inconsiderable amount of that 'dancing on the dangerous edge' Chris Matthews bemoans is being done by the very same people who are fretting that tea partiers will destroy this once-great nation.

If the left and the media were really worried about political violence, they might save some moralizing for former Democratic strategist Skip Ohlsen. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported last week that Ohlsen was named in a search warrant in an ongoing investigation into an October 2008 parking garage bomb explosion that severely injured a 70-year-old Missouri attorney. They might have fearful pronouncements to spare for Bradley Neal Crowder and David Guy McKay, who were found guilty of plotting to bomb police cars outside last summer's Republican National Convention in St. Paul. Or they might save some of their outrage for Katyanne Marie Kibby, a Texas activist charged with threatening the man who turned Crowder and McKay in to the FBI.

But instead the left's self-righteous leaders fire-and-brimstone the townspeople with tales of a country doomed by loud health policy protests. In doing so, they sound as out-of-touch as *Footloose*'s Reverend Shaw Moore inveighing against the great peril of dancing the watoosie. They will not convince regular Americans that the honored civic pastime of political protest is un-American, inherently dangerous, or terroristic simply because it is undertaken by conservatives.

What we learned in the last month is that people who have been energetically organizing, filling town halls and high-school gymnasiums, and staging protests for most of their lives are more than a little dismayed to find out that the other side can do it, too. There will always be a risk of unrest at any political protest, left or right, and that risk increases with the emotion and energy surrounding the debate. And it will always be important to call for civility in heated debates, and to treat public forums and our right to speak in them with the respect they deserve.

But encouraging responsible civic behavior was not the mission of the hyperventilating liberals this August. Instead, they aimed to impose a social cost and scrutiny on conservatives who protest that they had never previously imposed on protesters closer to their own political persuasion. The high-profile throttling of people like Bert Stead and Bob MacGuffie, who merely spoke out or organized friends to do the same, was meant to send a message. Free-market grandmas around the country were meant to look at Stead and MacGuffie and wonder if they wanted to turn themselves into piñatas for the MSNBC hosts or should keep quiet instead. Pro-life moms attending town hall meetings, perhaps for the first time in their lives, were meant to recoil at the label of "racist" or "terrorist" and wonder whether staying at home with the kids might be a better course of action. William Rice is wary of similar treatment, saying he's avoiding most media for fear that "I'll end up being some sort of a bad guy," but he remains "optimistic that a healthy debate is good. I hope that it all works out for all of us." MacGuffie is still organizing conservatives in Connecticut, and Stead has already returned to the protest field on his Gold Wing, defending himself and Herger at a liberal demonstration calling for the congressman's resignation.

Indeed, judging by the tea party protests of last spring, the health care protests of August, and protests planned for September and beyond, with enthusiasm seemingly uncurbed, the wrath of Keith Olbermann and Chris Matthews and the "un-American" insults of Nancy Pelosi, Steny Hoyer, and their caucus are being laughed off. Perhaps the Reverend Moores of the left will learn there's a new kid in town, and when it comes to "civic engagement" (as they might call it), everybody can cut footloose. ♦

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The Pakistani military showcases detained insurgents and their weapons, captured in the Khyber region.

REUTERS

Our Pakistan Problem

The nuclear armed, insurgent-plagued, swing state of South Asia

By Christian Brose & Daniel Twining

What national interest does the United States have in Afghanistan? According to recent polls, more and more Americans doubt there is any—or at least enough to warrant escalation of the war. This flagging support partly reflects the inadequate job the Obama administration has done explaining its goals and strategy in Afghanistan to a skeptical public. But it also reflects the underappreciated fact that succeeding in Afghanistan and defeating America's enemies there, as important as that is in its own right, is even more so for its effects in shaping Pakistan's future. That is the bigger prize. Put it this way: If we achieve the best case outcome in Afghanistan—a relatively secure and democratic country free of al Qaeda and its allies—but fail to prevent the worst case outcome in Pakistan—a failed or Talibanized state with nuclear weapons—we've still lost.

Of course, the importance of Pakistan has not gone unnoticed. It has spawned the shorthand "Af-Pak"—the idea being that the principal U.S. mission is to defeat al Qaeda in Afghanistan, and that requires stabilizing Pakistan. In truth, it's the other way around: It is Pakistan that is the swing

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state of South Asia, whose success could propel the region's development and whose failure could mire it in even worse instability. Shaping a positive future for Pakistan requires a new approach to the problem—and central to that is not abandoning the war in Afghanistan, but winning it.

Pakistan is not only a first-order foreign policy challenge for the United States—the nexus of terrorism, nuclear weapons, Islamic extremism, democracy promotion, and the geopolitical intersection of South and Central Asia and the Middle East—it's also the hardest to shape for the better. For all of the U.S. assistance to Pakistan and involvement in its internal affairs over the last decade, our influence remains limited and indirect. We don't have troops on the ground or the leverage to define outcomes directly. We don't have, for security reasons, much opportunity to move around the country, which is essential to conducting broad-based diplomacy and monitoring development programs. We don't have the trust of the Pakistani people, who view America—not unfairly, given recent history—as a fickle ally that only wants a transactional relationship and will abandon Pakistan as soon as it is convenient. And most important, we don't necessarily have common interests with the dominant actor inside Pakistan—the military—which supports U.S. enemies and is hostile to U.S. goals, especially in Afghanistan.

Pakistani soldiers patrolling Mingora, capital of the Swat valley

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Indeed, the American vision for South Asia is at odds, even in conflict, with that of Pakistan's military. We envision an Afghanistan in which a legitimate, democratic state is capable of defeating the insurgency and fostering opportunity for its people; the Pakistani military views Afghanistan as a source of strategic depth against India and backs Taliban fighters to achieve it. The United States envisions a global strategic partnership with a rising India and an enduring peace between New Delhi and Islamabad; Pakistan's military views India as an existential threat to be countered asymmetrically with terrorists based in and backed by Pakistan. Finally, the United States seeks a comprehensive relationship with a civilian-led, democratic Pakistan to fight extremism and expand justice and prosperity for its people; elements of the Pakistani security establishment undermine exactly these goals by meddling in politics and sponsoring terrorism.

This is in some respects a zero-sum game. The realization of U.S. goals in South Asia would necessarily come at the expense of the Pakistani military's interests, as it currently defines them—for it would undercut the military's political legitimacy and privileged place in Pakistani society. The United States thus finds itself in the unenviable position of having major strategic interests in the future of Pakistan, while the internal actor with the most influence over that future is a military establishment with little incentive to cooperate fully with U.S. objectives. We can neither compel the Pakistani military to decisively change its behavior nor impose change directly ourselves.

How, then, do we further U.S. interests in Pakistan and South Asia?

For too long, the U.S. approach to Pakistan has swung sharply between two extreme assumptions: One, that the Pakistani military is really a U.S. ally with which we have common interests and to which we should defer to do the right thing; the other, that Pakistan's military leaders are hostile to U.S. goals, but that we can directly compel them to work against their own interests. The former overstates the enlightened self-interest of our Pakistani "partners"; the latter our ability to change their behavior.

A better approach would deal with Pakistan as it is, not as we might want it to be. This means accepting that those calling the shots in Pakistan are not our natural allies. Nor can we change their worldview directly through our actions and appeals or top-down dictates. Rather, we must work from the bottom up, creating incentives that could lead Pakistan's leaders to make new choices. Call it the indirect approach. The focus is less on sweeping initiatives to change Pakistani thinking in one master stroke (like an elusive Kashmir deal) than on incremental steps to create new

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realities, new facts on the ground, to which Pakistan's leaders would be forced to adapt.

This is as much a problem of psychology as policy. Few nations are as paranoid as Pakistan—where it is a widespread belief that India is behind every setback, that the United States plans to seize Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, that America is out to undermine Pakistani democracy, and that Washington can't be trusted. This paranoia explains many of Pakistan's policies: why America is treated as both ally and adversary in national security planning, for instance, or why Pakistan sponsors the Taliban in Afghanistan as a hedge against both New Delhi and Washington.

Some of this paranoia is baseless; some less so, especially considering past U.S. support for Pakistani dictators. But this misses the point: Pakistani paranoia is real in the minds of the country's leaders, so we must deal with it as a fact whether we like it or not. We should not dismiss Pakistani insecurity or try to disabuse the country's leadership of it through rational discourse. Rather, we should take Pakistan's paranoia as the point of departure for our policies and pursue incremental but sustained actions to create new facts on the ground that might lead Islamabad to alter its strategic calculus. This would be a slow, systematic, and evolutionary—not revolutionary—approach to changing the strategic context of Pakistani decision-making and so nudging Pakistan in a direction more favorable to American interests in South and Central Asia.

Some Pakistani paranoia is baseless; some less so, especially considering past U.S. support for the country's dictators. But the paranoia is real in the leaders' minds, so we must deal with it as a fact.

What would the elements of such a strategy be?

First and most important would be defeating Pakistan's terrorist proxies in Afghanistan—and, as much as possible, in Pakistan. Despite new and welcome Pakistani pressure on militants fighting within the tribal regions, there is still little evidence that Pakistan's military has broken its longstanding Faustian bargain with Taliban fighters in Afghanistan, viewing their fight instead as the ideal path to Pakistan's own security. The best chance to end Pakistani support for terrorism in Afghanistan—and India—is to demonstrate in a visceral way that its allies are losing and that if Islamabad does not stop backing them, it will end up with little influence in Afghanistan and less security as a result. Only once the facts on the ground change might Pakistani policies follow suit.

This suggests an opposite way of thinking about the "Af-Pak" challenge from the one the Obama administration has presented. We should not assume that Pakistani cooperation holds the key to progress in Afghanistan, and that the former is a prerequisite for the latter. To the contrary, the United States and its Afghan and NATO allies can make significant gains in Afghanistan without the Pakistani military choosing to fight cross-border militancy rather than support it—a choice it likely won't make anyway.

What's more, the benefit of defeating the Pakistani-backed enemies of Afghanistan goes beyond its value as a prerequisite for Afghanistan's stabilization and development, as important as that is. Defeating the Taliban would help secure the greater U.S. goal: fostering a realization among the Pakistani military that their terrorist allies, washing in waves over the Pakistani border, are breaking against a hardened Afghan state, and that to continue backing violent extremists will only leave Pakistan isolated, insecure, and weakened. Ending Afghanistan's status as a playing field for Pakistan's military-intelligence forces will also weaken the security establishment's influence in Pakistani politics, advancing the U.S. objective—shared by most Pakistanis—of strengthening civilian rule.

With President Obama's change of strategy and leadership in Afghanistan, the United States and its allies could now accomplish these goals. What remains is to put the necessary resources behind General Stanley McChrystal's new counterinsurgency plan, which is the best chance to achieve success as the United States should define it: a representative, self-sustaining Afghan state that can defeat the insurgency and al Qaeda without a permanent Western military presence. Beyond surging U.S. troops to protect the Afghan population and strengthening the country's governing institutions and security forces, a controversial yet critical component of this strategy is continuing to target and eliminate high-value Taliban and al Qaeda leaders through drone strikes in western Pakistan, which on balance has been an effective counterterrorism tool.

A second step: While helping our Afghan partners to grind down their Pakistani-backed enemies, we can also seriously engage with Islamabad over its security concerns in Afghanistan. We may not always view Pakistan's professed insecurities as legitimate, and many of them surely are not, but it is counterproductive to downplay or dismiss them for that reason. Instead, as Marin Strmecki has suggested, the United States, together with its Afghan allies, should seek "to draw out from Pakistani military and intelligence leaders what are their strategic concerns and … how these might be addressed in a manner consistent with a strong and stable Afghanistan."

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This might include establishing a transparent system of agreements to govern how regional actors like India and Pakistan exercise influence in Afghanistan. Another, simpler step would be closer consultation with Pakistan to take into account more of its concerns on issues of Afghan reconstruction, from building infrastructure to training security forces. Pakistani leaders must accept and reconcile themselves to the fact that regional powers—especially India—will remain important players in Afghanistan. But the most practical way to get Pakistan to accept this unpalatable fact, and to stop defining its national security as the destabilization of its neighbors, is to demonstrate that diplomatic avenues exist for it to peacefully shape the nature of others' influence in Afghanistan.

A third step is to help Islamabad and New Delhi normalize their fraught relationship—a massive undertaking, to be sure, but one that civilian leaders in both countries have been increasingly outspoken about dealing with urgently. The best way for the United States to help is not a high-profile attempt to mediate an elusive deal on Kashmir. This would only alienate both countries. Indeed, the best thing America can do is stay out of the way. After all, the greatest progress in Indo-Pakistani relations to date occurred in secret talks from 2004-07, which were enabled by the strong ties that Washington enjoyed independently with leaders in each country.

We should continue to supply Pakistan's general staff with the weapons platforms they covet, but we should do that as a way of taking off the table their argument that Pakistan lacks adequate defenses.

A better approach is to focus on small steps that help Pakistan and India overcome obstacles to peace by achieving incremental progress where their interests converge. This could include greater U.S. intelligence sharing with India and Pakistan bilaterally to counter Pakistani terrorists who threaten both societies. It could include increased sharing of technology to facilitate the transit of goods and people in ways that enhance border security. It could include more assistance for positive regional initiatives like a planned pipeline to bring natural gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India via Afghanistan, and a framework for managing precious Himalayan water resources. And it could include support for Indo-Pakistani cooperation in building roads, railways, and other regional infrastructure that deepen economic interdependence in South Asia. Establishing new patterns of cooperation in these ways, rather than trying to force an unlikely ideological convergence, is the most realistic way to build confidence between these old rivals.

A fourth way to create new incentives that could lead Pakistan to alter its security policies is through an approach of "more for more" on military relations and supply. For decades, U.S. security assistance to Pakistan has been schizophrenic: At times, we write blank checks to the general staff; at other times, we renege on our commitments to supply the Pakistani armed forces with coveted hardware, even going as far as severing military-to-military relations altogether in the 1990s and imposing sanctions. After several years of playing Santa Claus under the Bush administration, there are now calls to revert to being Scrooge, including by denying Pakistan access to further supplies of its beloved F-16. This is no way to deal with a paranoid country that doubts America's commitment to its security. And it is certainly no way to convince Pakistan that its main security threat is not India, but the insurgency within its own borders, and that it should entirely reorient its military to conduct counterinsurgency, not just conventional warfare.

Because Pakistan's military leaders doubt that such a transformation serves their interests, they have to be goaded into it. That means addressing their insecurities head on and bolstering America's credibility as a reliable supplier of military training, education, and hardware to Pakistan. We should continue to supply Pakistan's general staff with the weapons platforms it covets, but we should do that as a way of taking off the table their argument that Pakistan lacks adequate defenses. The goal should be to ensure that Pakistan's military views America—not Saudi Arabia, China, or the Taliban—as its ally of choice. And we should use this conventional military assistance and training not just as reassurance but as pressure on Pakistan's military to adopt reforms and accept an expanded train-and-equip program that prepare it for counterinsurgency warfare. This approach would also help to inculcate in the Pakistani officer corps an understanding of the military's proper role in a democracy as a way of strengthening civilian government in Islamabad.

More paranoid and skeptical of the United States than even the Pakistani security establishment is the Pakistani public, as America's low public approval ratings show in poll after poll. That is why a fifth and final element of shaping a favorable Pakistani strategic outlook is supporting opportunity for the Pakistani people and helping them to strengthen the political and economic institutions that too often fail them. This is not simply a lib-

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eral ideal but a hardheaded national interest: Neither Pakistan's officer corps nor its civilian leadership will cooperate openly and systematically with the United States if prevailing Pakistani opinion rates Osama bin Laden higher than Barack Obama.

We won't change this dynamic through huge public diplomacy efforts to convince Pakistanis that America really is their friend; rather, we can win this support bit by bit, from the bottom up, through actions that tangibly benefit Pakistanis. It is worth recalling that the greatest outpouring of Pakistani support for America in recent memory occurred during the U.S. relief effort following the 2005 earthquake. That is why sustained U.S. reconstruction and development assistance for the several million refugees who have fled fighting in northwest Pakistan could make such a major contribution now, particularly given the Pakistani government's own shortcomings in offering assistance. The Obama administration deserves credit on this score: It has pledged more than $300 million in assistance.

More strategically, Washington can commit itself to the same scale and intensity of investment in Pakistan's economic development and civilian governance as it has to funding and equipping its armed forces. For too long, U.S. assistance efforts have been plagued by bureaucratic ineptitude, squandered by Pakistani corruption, and hamstrung by insecurity. But there is a model for U.S. development assistance that has succeeded under the hardest of all possible circumstances in Pakistan, in its remote and dangerous Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Under USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), a small team of U.S. nationals working with hundreds of Pakistani colleagues have succeeded precisely by departing from USAID's traditional development playbook. OTI employs Pakistanis and buys its materials from local sources. It creates democratic mechanisms for local ownership of all its assistance programs. And it rigorously measures success in terms of outcomes, not outputs, using multiple means of accountability. Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke was reportedly so taken with OTI's work during an early visit to Pakistan that he expressed shock that its budget wasn't many times its current size. That would be a good start—to be followed by applying this small office's approach to development in the FATA throughout Pakistan.

Many of Pakistan's pathologies—its lack of territorial control, poor governance and development, weak rule of law, and overfunding of its military at the expense of other public priorities—are a function of the country's failure to build institutions that deliver for the Pakistani people. This creates a vicious circle in which U.S. security interests demand a partnership with Pakistan's military, which is far more capable than the country's civilian institutions, but the very act of our working around these civilian institutions only weakens them further. It also serves to exacerbate Pakistan's mounting Taliban insurgency and make it more difficult to defeat. That's why the United States can begin building a long-term partnership with Pakistan to strengthen the civilian institutions of its democratic state.

In this endeavor, as in all of the others listed above, the ultimate goal is to reorient Pakistan's views of its national security. This change will not be brought about through U.S. pleading or persuasion; Pakistan's civilian and military leaders must choose it themselves, and America can increase the likelihood that they will do so by creating new incentives, new realities, new facts on the ground that militate in favor of changing Pakistani attitudes. This is an indirect effort, but it can be effective.

The anti-Americanism of the Pakistani people won't be changed easily.

NEWSCOM

Pakistan is a paranoid country that conceives of its national security in ways that are destructive to its neighbors, to us, and to itself. The United States should deal with Pakistan as it is, but we should not accept that it has to remain that way. Shaping a more positive future for Pakistan—the nuclear armed, insurgent-plagued, swing state of South Asia—is possible, necessary, and extremely urgent. It is what is most at stake in the "Af-Pak" conflict. And it is why the idea of losing in Afghanistan should be unthinkable. ♦

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Sir Maurice Bowra, left, and Charlie Chaplin taking tea, Wadham College, 1962

KEYSTONE / GETTY IMAGES

The Oxford Man

Maurice Bowra, tutor to the stars

BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

The Immoral Front, which may have escaped your notice, was led by a short stocky man, an Oxford don named Maurice Bowra, and was in business from the early twenties until 1971, when its leader died at the age of 72.

A classicist by training, an iconoclast by temperament, Bowra was a disciple-maker by instinct. He cultivated the young, even when quite young himself, cultivated them toward the end not of supporting any specific line or precise doctrine but of standing opposed to all that was stuffy, dreary, or closed one off to harmless pleasure and widening experience. Better to be immoral, the unwritten motto of the Immoral Front might read, if conventional morality ended in deadening the spirit. The Immoral Front, as Noel Annan noted, "embraced all those of whom the smug Establishment of the age of Baldwin disapproved—Jews, homosexuals, people whose odd views, or ways of life, or contempt for stuffiness made disreputable."

Maurice Bowra
A Life
by Leslie Mitchell
Oxford, 400 pp., $50

"He was the most celebrated Oxford character since Jowett, whom he surpassed in scholarship and warmth of character," Hugh Lloyd Jones wrote of Maurice Bowra. "Using the word in its time-honored sense," wrote Annan, "he was beyond doubt or challenge the greatest don of his generation." Lest one be lulled by the eulogistic note, consider, please, the other side, a piece in the London *Observer* that noted of Bowra that "he seemed to convey to bright young men the dazzling possibility that malice might be a form of courage and gossip a form of art." No one who knew him could be neutral about Maurice Bowra. But then, Bowra himself did not view the world neutrally either, seeing it instead as implacably divided between friends and enemies.

Oxford during Maurice Bowra's years was a Versailles for intellectuals; picking up on this notion, Elizabeth

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Longford called Bowra "Voltaire and the Sun King rolled into one." The university was filled with complex intramural machinations, refined backstabbing, played out by a cast of extraordinary characters. "I really ought to keep Oxford memoirs," Isaiah Berlin wrote to a friend, "so many funny things happen between my colleagues, such cold persecutions, such peculiarly grotesque views of one another."

Born in 1898, son of a father who spent his professional life as a high-level customs official in China during the age of British empire, Bowra was just old enough to fight in World War I. (When greeting E.R. Dodds, a contemporary who was a conscientious objector and whose candidacy won out over his for the Regius Professorship of Greek, Bowra is supposed to have said, "So what did you do during the war, Doddy?") He visited Russia before the Revolution and, along with an English public schoolboy's impressive knowledge of Greek and Latin, soon acquired reading knowledge of Russian and of all the major European languages. The most English of Englishmen, he nonetheless had a cosmopolitan spirit, and claimed to feel more at ease in Asia and the Middle East than in England.

Bowra early came by a distaste for authority and a pleasure in breaking rules. If he had a politics—he accorded politics generally a low rank in the scale of human importance—he was perhaps a libertarian of the left. Without indulging in snobbery, he was nonetheless a thorough elitist, a boy and then a man who hated the establishment, any establishment, and hated it, so to say, as such. This lent a nice contradiction to his career, for he was keen for official praise and recognition, delighted in all the honorary degrees, the Oxford Professorship of Poetry, and other offices and prizes that came his way, including a knighthood over which, in the best Oxonian spirit of sniping, some of his friends mocked him. John Sparrow, himself later warden of All Souls College, proposed, according to Isaiah Berlin, to write congratulating Bowra "on his baronetcy (due to faulty intelligence), explaining how much more distinguished this was than a paltry knighthood, which nowadays went to every Tom, Dick, and Harry."

The sexual preference for every Englishman of Bowra's generation has to be stipulated, and his own was homosexuality, at least during the years of his early manhood. He was later infatuated by many women, proposed marriage thrice, and was once even formally engaged. When someone noted of his courting Sir Thomas Beecham's niece that she was reputed to be a lesbian, he riposted that "buggers can't be choosers."

"Almost certainly Bowra was not exclusively homosexual," writes Leslie Mitchell, his biographer, who adds that "to worry too much about Maurice's sexuality was somehow to miss the point. He was to be considered as sage, jester, or ringmaster, but not as lover." Late in life, Bowra himself, according to Mitchell, "dismissed 'buggery' as being merely useful for filling in that awkward time between tea and cocktails."

For a man with the reputation of an intellectual bully, Bowra was, as perhaps many bullies are, vulnerable and insecure. He felt himself vulnerable about his homosexuality—fearful that it might be used against him, even in less than notoriously heterosexual Oxford society, and undermine his authority. And he felt a strong element of intellectual insecurity, bestowed upon him as an undergraduate, the gift of a fiercely pedantic tutor at New College named H.W.B. Joseph, whom he had for the Greats (or historical and philosophical) portion of his degree in classics. Joseph did his best weekly to humiliate him and convince him that his wasn't a first-class mind. As Leslie Mitchell writes, "Much decorated and applauded [later in life] though he was, Bowra was never completely convinced of his credentials as a scholar. Joseph remained a demonic presence throughout his life."

Writing Maurice Bowra's biography, the first on its subject, cannot have been an easy chore. The power of an Oxford don is finally, whatever its charm, narrowly circumscribed. To make things more difficult, Bowra was a notable conversationalist—the philosopher A.J. Ayer claimed Bowra, Isaiah Berlin, and Cyril Connolly were the three great conversationalists of his day—shooting off *mots*, puns, *aperçus*, and lacerating put-downs at rapid fire, and glittering conversation, like beauty and goodness, is neither easily nor persuasively captured on the page. A man of prodigious vitality, an unrelenting tornado of energy, the chief presence and centerpiece in any room he entered, Bowra dominated by force of his wit and intelligence.

"His influence stemmed from his being the cleverest and funniest man one had ever met," Mitchell, who knew Bowra when himself an undergraduate, reports. No one parted company with him without taking away a memorable riposte, deliciously oblique irony, or thumping take-down. Mitchell has collected many of these, and sets them out to good effect in this lucid and nicely measured biography.

Bowra was not a dreary, or even a dull, writer; yet, because not so dazzling a writer as a talker, he tended to be, for those who knew his talk, either through personal experience or legend, a disappointing one. Attempting to account for this, Mitchell suggests that some of this may have been owing to his deliberate decision to keep his personality out of his writing, especially his scholarly writing about the ancient Greeks. Cyril Connolly nicely captures the temper of Bowra's mind as exhibited in his prose: "He has the quality which certain judges possess of cutting through the nonsense and assessing human worth; he is anti-fusser, an anti-bunker rather than a debunker, who wears his humanism like a bullet-proof vest." Far from unproductive, he turned out some 30-odd volumes of criticism and translation.

Mitchell reports that Bowra's family knew nothing of his academic distinction, and people who knew Bowra for decades were unaware that he had brothers and sisters. This speaks to how thoroughly anchored in Oxford his life was. He went to Oxford from Cheltenham, a public school meant to train boys for a military career, in which he had no interest. He began at New College, where he earned a first-class degree, whence he was appointed a tutor, then dean, and finally warden of Wadham College, a post he held for 32

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years, between 1938 and 1970, so that, as Mitchell notes, "Wadham and Bowra's name became synonymous."

The differences setting off one Oxford (and Cambridge) college from another are neatly set out by Mitchell's mention of the game of the time in which they were compared to European federated republics. Thus, New College was England; Christ Church was France; Balliol, America; Jesus College was Yugoslavia; Exeter, Romania; Corpus Christi, Denmark. What country Wadham was properly compared to isn't specified, though Bowra greatly raised its prominence. Stuart Hampshire claimed he wanted to make it into "Czechoslovakia, small but enlightened and respected," which he seems to have done through careful appointment of fellows and selection of undergraduates and, most of all, through the force of his own powerful personality.

As an Oxford don, Bowra thought himself in the tradition of Gilbert Murray: someone who did intensive scholarship yet wrote for intelligent general readers, keeping the tradition of Greek culture alive while disseminating it as widely as possible. He translated Pindar, wrote an important book on Homer, and, though his work in Greek scholarship came to be thought old-fashioned, he was not in the least reluctant to continue working in this vein throughout his life: first, because he believed the ancient Greeks still supplied the best model available of the good life, and second, as Leslie Mitchell writes, because "his Greek studies were so intimately entwined in aspects of his personality that they could not be easily readjusted."

If Bowra may be said to have been a proselytizer, it was on behalf of the Greek ideal and of the centrality in life, to the cultivated classes, of the elevation that great poetry made to the enhancement of life. When young, Bowra wished to write serious poetry himself, but recognized it wasn't in him to do so. His taste in contemporary poetry was less than infallible; among the poets he admired and promoted were Yeats and Edith Sitwell, Dylan Thomas and Sidney Keyes. He wrote well on Dante, Milton, Pushkin, and others, and thought himself a servant to poetry. But most assuredly, to no one or nothing else.

Cultivating the young was, for Bowra, both a way of exerting his influence and a way of alleviating his loneliness. Apart from mornings working at his desk, he seems seldom to have been alone. Once, on a rare occasion when he went off on holiday by himself, he reported: "I found myself—a horrible discovery. I have been trying ever since to lose myself." He was a thoroughly social being, lonely as only a deeply gregarious bachelor can be, a man, by nature, of the group, the clique, the coterie. He held, as his friend the medieval historian Ernst Kantorowicz put it, that "happiness is not to be found in power nor in money, but in good food and truth and wine."

The roster of Bowristas, as Bowra's young acolytes were known, is impressive, and includes: C. Day-Lewis, Kenneth Clark, A.J. Ayer, John Betjeman, Noel Annan, Stuart Hampshire, Isaiah Berlin, Anthony Powell, Henry Yorke (the novelist Henry Green), Cyril Connolly, John Sparrow, and Hugh Gaitskell, who disappointed Bowra by wasting his life in politics and becoming leader of the British Labour party. To be a Bowrista was to be taken up as a friend to Bowra, who always remained first among equals.

The reward was, from most accounts, to feel a sense of liberation. Under his spell, life seemed filled with promise, charm, comedy. Bowra taught the chosen undergraduates, as Mitchell puts it, "that life could be about what was possible, rather than what was allowed." Yet if one lingered too long under Bowra's influence, the result could be an uncomfortable domination. "I think," Anthony Powell wrote, "for young men who wanted to develop along lines of their own—it was best to know Bowra, then get away; if necessary return to him in due course to appreciate the many things he had to offer."

To be among the chosen was to be invited to attend Bowra's dinners, at which splendid food accompanied radiant talk, much of it expressed in Bowra's own pointed language of derogation. Up for slaying were smugness and pomposity; so too the confidence of scientists in their superiority and the self-importance of politicians, whose posturings Bowra enjoyed seeing crushed by scandal.

Among the Bowristas, one could be cruel only if also witty. Of an Oxford character known for his false geniality, Bowra remarked that at their last meeting the man gave him "the warm shoulder." Of a mediocre figure rising in the world, he remarked: "You cannot keep a second-rate man down." He once allowed that the suicide rate of undergraduates was "higher than it ought to be." The term *homintern*, denoting the assumed cabal of homosexuals, a play on the Communist Third International, was his invention. "You don't get the best value out of your selfishness," he once remarked, "if you're selfish all the time." Bowra could in fact be extraordinarily generous to friends.

The devastating yet understated put-down has long been a specialty of the house at Oxford and at Cambridge. If not started by Maurice Bowra, it was given a great boost by him. Although I attended neither school, I experienced it in ample measure through the conversation of my friend Edward Shils, who was a fellow of King's College and Peterhouse at Cambridge and was a talker, I believe, the equal of Bowra in his powers of subtle derogation. Of Isaiah Berlin, for example, Edward would say, "He is a charming man and has doubtless given great pleasure to his friends." Uncoded, this meant that Berlin's writing was shallow and he was utterly without intellectual courage. (Edward also told me that behind Berlin's unwillingness to speak out against the student uprising of the 1960s was his fear of the disapproval of Maurice Bowra and Stuart Hampshire.)

When I introduced Edward to the bounderish English journalist Henry Fairlie, he said: "Mr. Fairlie, you wrote some brilliant things in the 1950s [the year was then 1978], but now I understand you have become a socialist. Justify yourself, please." Fairlie answered that he had been turned by hearing Michael Harrington lecture in Chicago, to which Edward, without missing a stroke, replied: "Michael Harrington in

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Chicago—surely a case of worst comes to worst."

To be thought a disappointment to Bowra was, among the Bowristas, a serious blow. "I have known what it is to be hated by Maurice," wrote Cyril Connolly, "and I have spent several years in the wilderness; it was a devastating experience. One would wake up in the middle of the night and seem to hear that inexorable luncheon-party voice roar over one like a bulldozer." Bowra once introduced Connolly, whose lassitude was famous, by announcing, "Coming man." Pause. "Hasn't come yet."

John Sparrow, warden of All Souls and, like Connolly, another well-known under-producer, was another Bowrista who disappointed Bowra. When Sparrow published his once-famous essay on what Lady Chatterly and the gamekeeper were really doing in the sack, Bowra wrote to him:

> Well done. It is good to see the old cause of dirt so well defended, and I admire you very much for your skillful argument and even more having been able to read and remember the book, which must have been a grueling experience for you. I comfort myself with the thought that now I need never read it.

Sparrow, with whom I had spent some time, began a dinner we had together by asking me whether it was true that Americans believed that all men were created equal. I averred that one of our key documents did so state. "Well," he said, "I suppose they had better believe it, for there's no actual evidence for it." On another occasion, after a dinner in his honor at the University of Chicago, Edward Shils and I repaired to Sparrow's room at the Quadrangle Club, where he, in dinner clothes, clutching a bouquet of roses, perhaps one-and-a-half-to-two-sheets to the wind, began to attack dogs. He attacked them for their subservience, for their sucking-up propensities, for their uncritical adoration of their masters; so much less interesting were they than cats.

"Mr. Sparrow," I said to him, "I have to confess to you that I own a dog. He is a small dog, to be sure, but I love him."

"I see," he replied. "Very well, then, keep him. But when he dies, pray do not replace him."

Englishmen, as has been said, are divisible into two groups: boys and old boys.

Slight though Bowra's renown is today, it lives on, or so many people believe, in his being the model for Mr. Samgrass, the snobbish Oxford don who sucks up to the Marchmains in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*. Bowra spotted this, and pretended to enjoy it. Waugh was a borderline Bowrista, but relations between the two powerful personalities were never easy. Bowra thought that Waugh's best writing was inspired by hatred, and when Bowra was knighted, Waugh, no slouch at derogation himself, wrote to Nancy Mitford: "It is really very odd as he had done nothing to deserve it except be head of the worst college at Oxford and publish a few books no one has ever read."

Evelyn Waugh, 1931

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

Leslie Mitchell finds the character of Mr. Samgrass, however interesting in himself, well off the mark of its life model. He notes that Bowra's snobbery was not social but entirely intellectual: "He preferred clever people to stupid people. The only entry qualification into his court was intelligence." One is reminded here of Bowra's own hierarchical order for admitting undergraduates to Wadham: "Clever boys, interesting boys, pretty boys—no shits."

On the snobbery front, Bowra did not find Bloomsbury at all appealing, and of Virginia Woolf remarked that "I find her a bore, dislike her imagery, suspect her psychology." As for Bloomsbury generally, he found it pretentious in the extreme, "with its ridiculous little philosophy about beautiful states of mind." The Garsington of Lady Ottoline Morrell, whom he described as "a baroque flamingo," was more to his liking. He was also a regular guest at Margot Asquith's literary salon, where a combination of political and literary figures was on offer, and which gave him a cachet, upon his return to Oxford, as a man of the great world outside the university.

No doubt Bowra would have preferred to be more worldly still, but, with the outbreak of World War II, no one offered him interesting work—nothing diplomatic in America, nothing at Bletchley breaking codes, nothing doing spy work. He had to settle for being a member of the Home Guard. He felt wounded and left behind. Only later were his spirits revived, when he was made vice chancellor of Oxford and, later, president of the British Academy. He turned out to be an effective if always impatient administrator, setting records for the briefness of his meetings.

"Bowra had," Mitchell writes, "the confidence of a man who had belief." Belief, firmly held, gives one a point of view, and combined with the right temperament, a sense of humor. Bowra believed that the university was a sacrosanct institution, with barbarians always hovering just outside the gates. In the matter of honorary degrees, he felt, as Mitchell writes, that "whom the University chose to honor was a public statement of its own purpose." (North-

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western University, where I taught for many years, has recently awarded honorary degrees to Robert Redford, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, and Studs Terkel, which is certainly a fine statement of its own purpose.) As for appointments, he deemed it important that people who valued what he, Bowra, did be in place to carry through those things that most deserved to live on.

What Maurice Bowra valued was literary culture, anchored in ancient Greece. The literary point of view was what he admired above all; the quality of any nation, he felt, was to be found in the quality of its literature. He was properly suspicious of social science, and less than enthusiastic about science itself. No Bowristas were scientists. Organized religion, always a target for his humor, he called "marvelous rot," but claimed that without it "the boys will believe, alas, in science, and think it will cure all their ills, poor poops."

A one-culture man, he said, "I wish I knew why we had to keep up with technological developments, and suspect that much of it is bogus." Loathing bureaucracy, he feared the interference of government in university affairs. And while himself democratic in spirit, and welcoming to the grammar school boys who now had a chance at an Oxbridge education, he didn't believe that democracy otherwise had anything to do with education.

From all this one can see that Maurice Bowra was doomed to becoming a back number in his lifetime. When he wrote his memoirs, called *Memories*, he ended them in 1939. He did so because he understood that World War II and its aftermath would soon put paid to the Oxford he loved, and marked "the end of an era for the world and for me." He claimed not to understand the students of the 1960s, and found the entire time, in Leslie Mitchell's words, "often baffling and upsetting." Television, on which he refused to appear, appalled him: "All television corrupts," he said, "and absolute television corrupts absolutely." Evelyn Waugh knew the game was up for Bowra when he discovered that students at Wadham began referring to their warden as "Old Tragic."

Bowra was permitted to serve two years past the normal mandatory retirement age as warden of Wadham, and after his retirement was given rooms in the college. He was succeeded in the wardenship by a Bowrista, the philosopher Stuart Hampshire, which must have eased the blow of retirement somewhat.

Santayana says that, as we approach death, the world itself begins to look dark to us because we cannot imagine it being much good without us in it. Some of this darkness crept into Bowra's conversation. The decline of classical education dismayed and depressed him; the fading of the importance of literature, now everywhere surpassed by government financing of science in universities, was connected to this. Add on the diminutions that that relentless spectre, age, brings to the party. Like so many great talkers, Bowra became hard of hearing; eyesight and memory were dimming.

"I am going deaf and blind, and losing my memory," he wrote to Noel Annan. "It is time I became a bishop." He began to give out his address as Reduced Circumstances, Oxford. He died, of a heart attack, as he had hoped, in 1971.

Anyone of the least imagination who has visited Oxford, but never went there when young, cannot but feel a strong yearning for a world one has never known. But it is not contemporary Oxford for which one yearns, but the Oxford of the years between the wars and shortly thereafter. This was the Oxford of high intellectual style and gaiety, of dash and slashing wit, of oddballs and eccentrics, of brilliance and the love of serious learning—the Oxford, in short, of Maurice Bowra. ♦

Gospel Twins

The Cambridge women who unearthed a buried treasure. **BY DAWN EDEN**

Of all the fantastic sights to be seen in the Sinai desert in March 1892, surely one of the strangest was that of a group of travelers exiting the ancient St. Catherine's Monastery. The camel cortege featured the Gibson Girl-like silhouettes of two middle-aged Scottish widows—identical twin sisters—bobbing along in full Victorian dress, one of them struggling to read a Hebrew-language edition of the Book of Psalms.

But for those in the know, what was truly striking about the scene was the ladies' cargo, borne behind them by seven camels led by Bedouin drivers. Packed amid clothing, food, and souvenirs was a bulky camera and hundreds of negatives. Once the film was developed, scholars would gain their first look at one of the sisters' landmark discovery: the oldest existing copy of the four Gospels in Syriac.

The Sisters of Sinai
How Two Lady Adventurers Discovered the Hidden Gospels
by Janet Soskice
Knopf, 336 pp., $27.95

Janet Soskice's *Sisters of Sinai* traces the lives of Agnes and Margaret Smith from their small-town origins to their fame as manuscript hunters and their eventual acceptance as biblical scholars at a time when women were largely barred from academia.

Soskice, a Canadian-born theology professor and fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, relates the Smiths' story in four main acts: their childhood

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with a lawyer-father who encouraged their study of languages (their mother having died shortly after giving birth); various Middle East explorations leading to Agnes's finding what became known as the Sinaitic Palimpsest; return to St. Catherine's with Cambridge scholars to verify the discovery; and subsequent transatlantic fame.

To the author, having to use the devout Calvinist sisters' own writings as her main source material must have been, as was once said in Sinai, a blessing and a curse. While the twins, particularly Agnes, wrote extensively about their travels and their manuscript detective work, their prim Presbyterian prose is as dry as oat cakes: During the sisters' first excursion across the Sinai, for example, Agnes notes in her diary that she told a passing Bedouin sheikh "we had come to this country to see the way by which Neby Mousa [Moses] led the Israelites; and we consider it a figure of how God leads us along the hard path of earthly life."

To keep this book moving faster than a camel's pace, Soskice goes on numerous side trips spotlighting the more colorful characters who crossed the Smiths' paths. Early on, we learn that the fiery young preacher William Bruce Robertson, a close friend of the twins' father, had earlier been friends with the "altogether outré figure" Thomas De Quincey, author of *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater.* We learn that Rabbi Solomon Schechter, who would later become the architect of American Conservative Judaism, idolized the founder of Presbyterianism, John Knox—even displaying a portrait of Knox in his rooms at Cambridge. And we learn that the Cambridge antiquarian Samuel Savage Lewis, later Agnes's husband, once sparked an unfortunate incident that earned him the nickname "Satan."

> One of his windows . . . looked directly down into the chancel of St. Benet's Church. Passing the window and noticing a wedding taking place at the altar below, Lewis peered down to have a look. The bride chanced to look up and saw Lewis, "a notoriously ugly man with a straggling black beard peering down into the gloom of the church from above"; she cried "Satan!" and fainted.

Soskice is best known for her efforts to create a dialogue between feminism and mainstream theology. Her 2008 essay collection, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language*, addressed such questions as whether a feminist can call God "father." (Answer: Yes, with some mental acrobatics.) While clearly sympathizing with the Smiths' struggles to gain recognition within a nearly all-male establishment, she strenuously avoids inserting feminist language or otherwise attempting to settle political scores. The mere facts of the indignities the sisters endured because of their sex—including the baseless insinuation that Agnes got too cozy with the St. Catherine's abbot—show how much the atmosphere for female theologians has improved since their time.

As the author attempts to hide her editorial voice behind her research, the reader is left free to ponder the contrast between the Smiths' uniformly dry demeanor and the ethereal glow of the book's most memorable woman. Persis Burkitt enters the story as her Cambridge-professor husband becomes one of three professors taking part in an 1893 excursion with the Smiths to St. Catherine's to examine the palimpsest Agnes had discovered. As she joins them for the camel ride across the Sinai, the pre-Raphaelite beauty conquers souls with her exquisite manners and her unexpected command of gutter Arabic. She is as joyful and lively as the twins are antiseptic and scrupulous.

Burkitt spent several years of her childhood in Lebanon, where her mother did missionary work, taking the girl with her on a donkey as she distributed New Testaments to villagers. As a result Persis acquired not just colloquial Arabic, but the salty vocabulary favored by donkey drivers and, it now appeared, camel drivers. She upbraided the Bedouin in their own colorful dialect and was from that moment their firm favorite. They called her "Princess."

She left her young son with a nanny back home in Cambridge, but not her maternal instinct. Her adoring camel driver, a boy of 12 whose father had recently died, poured out his heart as he led her beast across the Sinai sands. The poignant image of the graceful English madonna lending her ears to the fatherless boy is particularly striking since Persis is effectively the only mother in the book.

St. Catherine's Monastery

HANAN ISACHAR / CORBIS

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When the travelers return to England, Burkitt quickly drops out of the picture as the Smiths enter into a dispute with her husband and another professor over who should gain credit for bringing the palimpsest to the attention of academia. Eventually the twins' scholarship would earn them honorary doctorates from St. Andrews, even as their adopted home of Cambridge was barred by its own rules from officially recognizing them.

Soskice cleverly uses a dramatic photo to drive home the extent to which women were personae non gratae at Cambridge. Taken on the day in 1896 when the university's undergrads voted overwhelmingly against awarding degrees to women, it shows throngs of young men in boater hats outside the Senate building awaiting the results of the referendum. Suspended from a window above the crowd, like a grotesque piñata, is an effigy of a bloomer-clad young woman astride a bicycle.

But surely the undergrads' vote was not targeted against the 53-year-old twin sisters whose collaboration with biblical scholars at the university had increased Cambridge's prestige. Soskice admits as much, writing that those against women's matriculation mainly feared that the presence of ladies would force them to "cut back on their drinking, gaming, and carousing, and other pleasures that made undergraduate life so sweetly memorable." It never seems to enter her mind that, perhaps, some students were concerned not with what those progressive young women on bicycles might bring but, rather, with the opportunity for full-time marriage and motherhood that they risked leaving behind.

However much a modern-day female theologian like Soskice might find inspiration in the Smiths' breaking of barriers, very little in the twins' lives was specifically feminine. Being widowed and childless, they had no need to finesse a work/life balance. As Rabbi Schechter might have put it, if either one of those bubbes had baytzim, her impact on history would have been the same—albeit with a Cambridge degree to show for it. ♦

Sacred Division

The nature of numbers raises questions of divinity.

BY DAVID GUASPARI

Sir Isaac Newton, Euclid

Fifty years ago Eugene Wigner, soon-to-be Nobel laureate in physics, published a soon-to-be-famous essay titled "The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences." It is remarkable, he wrote, that there should be laws of nature, remarkable that we should be able to discover them, and a "miracle" that they can be formulated in the language of mathematics. Unable to find a satisfactory explanation, Wigner could conclude only that this was "a wonderful gift which we neither understand nor deserve."

Is God a Mathematician?
by Mario Livio
Simon & Schuster, 320 pp., $26

Questions about the nature and significance of mathematics have been central to Western thought since at least the time of the semi-legendary Pythagoras—whose followers, said Aristotle, "fancied that the principles of mathematics were the principles of all things." According to one (suspect) tradition, a sign above the entrance to Plato's Academy read, "Let no one ignorant of geometry enter here." Plato regarded mathematics not as the highest kind of knowledge, but as a model: It grasped a reality beyond the world presented to our senses, and of which that perceptible world is an imperfect copy. Galileo famously declared that "the grand book [of the] universe . . . is written in the language of mathematics."

How can that be? Why can that be? Can such questions have answers?

Is God a Mathematician? offers to guide the general reader through this vertiginous intellectual terrain. We can hardly demand a rigorous reply to that metaphorical title—though some thin concluding thoughts are

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LEFT: TIME & LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES, RIGHT: BETTMANN / CORBIS

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put on offer. The book should be judged by its success in making the question vivid, even unsettling, by how well it awakens the wonder in Einstein's famous dictum that "the eternal mystery of the world is its comprehensibility."

By that standard I'd say it's, well, okay. (Gripes to follow.)

Chapter one introduces Wigner's puzzlement and some of the large themes into which it opens, such as the relation between the mind and the world and the closely related question of whether mathematics is invented or discovered. Most of the book is devoted to building up the mental muscles needed to enjoy a battle royal in which no side seems able to land a knockout blow.

How could Galileo and Newton have such success if there did not exist a world of mathematical truths that captured the structure of the world around us? But what could this supposed realm of immaterial objects have to do with the physical world? Mathematics is a human construct, invented for our own purposes.

But why should pure imaginings, human constructs, be able to describe the world? They allow us to think in the only way we can. Evolution has given us certain cognitive abilities. We have numbers because our distant ancestors found counting useful.

That may account for counting (with small numbers) but could not possibly explain the ability to invent calculus or non-Euclidean geometry . . .

Building up the muscles means learning some mathematics, which Livio presents historically. Popularizations seem to get much of their history by recycling the anachronisms of their predecessors. Like so many others, for example, Livio describes the celebrated Pythagorean discovery that the side and diagonal of a square have incommensurable lengths as a discovery about "the number $\sqrt{2}$"—even though "the number $\sqrt{2}$" was a concept unavailable to Pythagoras (or Plato or Euclid), for whom a number always meant something to count with.

So the reader is advised to trust, but verify.

After sketching the lives and works of Pythagoras and Plato, Livio does the same for a series of mathematical heroes: Archimedes, Descartes, Galileo, and Newton. With the triumph of Newtonian science, his title question assumes its modern form. Plato constructed a mythical mathematical cosmology that symbolized the intelligibility of a world that lies behind appearance. Newton's System of the Universe postulated a set of laws that made detailed predictions about the perceptible world. It could have been wrong in ways that Plato's imagery could not. Astonishingly, it wasn't—despite originating in, as Wigner points out, "a single, and at that time very approximate, numerical coincidence."

Livio travels many byways, but the central thread of his story lies in the accounts of non-Euclidean geometry and mathematical logic. Non-Euclidean geometry introduced and explored a realm of ideas once believed literally unthinkable—alternative geometrical axioms that contradict Euclid's. Euclid's axioms had always seemed inevitable, but the discovery of new geometries suggested that mathematics might be not a special domain of fundamental truths after all: It might only be a kind of game based on arbitrarily chosen assumptions.

No attempt to formulate axioms that capture all of mathematics can succeed. There will always be questions that cannot be answered.

The most famous result of mathematical logic, Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, turned up the heat. It implies that no attempt to formulate axioms that capture all of mathematics can succeed. There will always be questions that cannot be answered without making further assumptions, so analogs to non-Euclidean geometries must arise in all branches of mathematics. The foundational works of mathematical logic, by Frege and Russell and Whitehead, had undertaken to show that mathematics is, ultimately, nothing but logic. (A side effect: Mathematics is effective because the laws of mathematics are the laws of thought.) That attempt failed but, as is often noted, asked so deep a question that it led to amazing, if distressing, results.

The argument continues: *So what if we can't capture all of mathematics in one go? If we lacked a map of all China, would it mean that China wasn't there? Marco Polo had to face facts, and so did Newton.* Newton's math fit his physics because he tailored it to do so—he invented the mathematical game he needed.

Non-Euclidean geometry was a product of intellectual and aesthetic interest—but turned out half a century later to be exactly what Einstein needed to replace Newton's universe with the general theory of relativity. It's eerie that so much mathematics pursued solely for its beauty finds applications. It's no more eerie than a dream that comes true: We remember that one, and forget the many more that don't.

The pleasure in this succession of arguments and counterarguments is that each makes a serious point—but to cut deep they must be sharp. My gripe is that, as presented, they sometimes are not.

Consider this lazy comparison of Newton's gravitational theory with Einstein's. Newton's gravitational forces are transmitted instantaneously, which is incompatible with Einstein's postulate that effects cannot propagate faster than the speed of light. To illustrate why this "contradiction" would be "disastrous" to our "perceptions of cause and effect," Livio offers the following example: If the sun suddenly disappeared, according to Newton, the earth's motion would immediately change from (roughly) circular to (roughly) straight, but we on earth wouldn't see the sun's disappearance for the eight or so minutes it takes the sun's light to reach earth. The effect would seem to precede the cause.

To which a reader who is at all awake can only say: *So?* A bullet

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strikes its target before we hear the gun's report. Big deal. Bullets that travel faster than sound aren't disastrous to my perception of cause and effect. So what if gravity turns out to travel faster than light?

Nontechnical discussions can also be slack. Is mathematics, Livio asks rhetorically, the "hidden textbook" of the world? Or, he continues, "to use the biblical metaphor, is mathematics in some sense the ultimate fruit of the tree of knowledge?"

This sounds grand but comes up empty. The meaning of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is, to say the least, disputed: What kind of knowledge it represents; whether that knowledge is genuine, or something humans should want or have; why it's forbidden. The comparison sheds no light in either direction. It offers the reader nothing but a fist bump over a shared crumb of "cultural literacy."

Livio's conclusion suggests that we might resolve one question by agreeing that mathematics is both invented and discovered: We invent mathematical concepts and then discover things about them. But to leave it there is to leave the hard question unasked: whether the concepts we invent are in some sense forced on us. If beings from another galaxy have a science of numbers, does "prime number" have to play the central role it does in ours? More radically, if they have "science," do they have to have numbers?

Here we approach the realm of Borges's famous *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*, an imaginary encyclopedia from an imaginary society whose categories of thought have nothing in common with ours. Its classification of animals includes "those that belong to the emperor," "stray dogs," and "those that from a long way off look like flies."

Livio has chosen a fascinating subject and tackled it with enthusiasm (if a few too many exclamation points). Laymen will find much to chew on, and will encounter illustrative examples, such as logic and knot theory, that may be new to them.

Those undeterred by technical talk might prefer Wigner's short, sharp essay. ♦

Why Thee Wed

A tourist's map for the institution of marriage.

BY EVE TUSHNET

This new book on marriage and family begins with a bus ad the author spotted in Baltimore, featuring "a smiling couple proclaiming, 'Marriage works.'" He has written a book-length response: *Not always, not here.*

Andrew J. Cherlin argues that American family life is characterized by two conflicting ideals: an ideal of marriage, and an ideal of "expressive individualism," the belief that developing and expressing oneself should be a primary life goal. So we rush to the altar—a larger percentage of Americans marry than citizens in the other Western nations, and we marry earlier—but we have much greater difficulty sustaining our unions. We marry and divorce and remarry, or live with a series of cohabiting partners, subjecting our children to a revolving door of parents and quasi-parents.

The Marriage-Go-Round
The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today
by Andrew J. Cherlin
Knopf, 288 pp., $25.95

Cherlin writes, "There are more partners in the personal lives of Americans than in the lives of people of any other Western country." The end result is a startling statistic: "[C]hildren born to *married* parents in the United States were more likely to experience their parents' breakup than were children born to *cohabiting* parents in Sweden."

Cherlin also notes that Americans have always divorced more—and yet we've also always been especially exhortatory about marriage. While Europeans worried about producing enough babies—a problem which, in 1783, led Frederick the Great to argue that divorce shouldn't be "made too difficult" because unhappily married couples wouldn't have sex whereas happily remarried ones would—Americans worried about divorce.

If these tensions have been part of American life since the colonial period, can we hope to address them? Structural changes—birth control, a volatile economy, a growing reliance on post-secondary education and the accompanying delay of adulthood, and much more—have strengthened preexisting American patterns: "The percentage of children experiencing three or more mother's partners today in the United States is probably higher than in any Western country at any time in the past several centuries," Cherlin reports.

He contends that maybe this isn't so bad. It's "not calamitous," since while experiencing parents' "partnership turnover" does significantly raise children's risks of delinquency, substance abuse, and other social ills, *most* children who experience lots of parental turnover turn out okay. This is a weird criterion for judging the severity of social problems. One wonders if Cherlin would argue that homophobia isn't such a big deal since *most* gay teens don't kill themselves.

The actual picture Cherlin paints of life in a "marriage-go-round" household isn't pretty:

> [T]he lives of children living in the household can vary greatly: one child may have a devoted nonresident father who sees her regularly, another child who has no contact with her father jealously watches

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her half sister go away for weekends with her dad, and a third child—from the new partnership—has both of her parents in the household. One child may have health insurance coverage through her father's job and see a pediatrician regularly, while another child has no coverage and sees emergency room doctors only when she is seriously ill. The inequalities among children in the same household can be stark.

Instability, inequality, a sense that adults come and go regardless of the promises they make or the longings of their children: This isn't the apocalypse, but it's not acceptable.

Cherlin's solution is that, instead of just telling young adults to get married, we tell them instead to "slow down"—to focus on maintaining stable child-care arrangements, even if that means a single mom stays single rather than remarrying.

Along with a message change, we should address governmental structures that push mothers too quickly into cohabitation with men who can provide some financial support. Cherlin acknowledges the problems with an expansive welfare state; he suggests that increasing child-support payments might be a more palatable approach.

His focus on stability for children is admirable, but there are at least three problems he doesn't address.

First, what happens to the fathers? Marriage is still how our culture makes men into reliable dads. While it's true that just adding a man to a single-mother household doesn't necessarily help kids—studies vary wildly on whether step-parenting or single-parenting is better for kids; basically, the social science says "it depends"—one wonders where the men will go when they're no longer told that their presence is critical.

Second, cultural institutions win our loyalty by being beautiful. We aspire to them, and these longings help us make the sacrifices that society and our children need. Marriage, with its millennia of history and poetry, can be beautiful. Can "stable care arrangements for children" be inspiring enough to overcome deep-rooted American beliefs and lifestyles?

This question leads to the final one: What makes Cherlin think it's a better bet to try taming our marriage mania rather than our expressive individualism? Perhaps he's more embedded in the individualist mindset than he realizes. Throughout he suggests that "personal growth" and self-discovery are *opposed* to marriage and childrearing: "People pay attention to their experiences and make changes in their lives if they are not satisfied. They want to continue to grow and change throughout adulthood."

GETTY IMAGES

This formulation surrenders too much. If I leave an unfulfilling partnership, I've changed my *situation*; but have I changed *myself*? Have I experienced as much personal growth as I would if I reshaped myself in accordance with my role rather than ditching the role when it starts to chafe? Is the self we're expressing more static, less open to growth and change, than a self willing to make and keep lifelong promises?

Cherlin's work suggests cultural changes which would foster stable families. Reducing the stigma on living with one's parents as an adult would likely do a great deal of good, and help us with the broader cultural project of returning to a view of marriage as the foundation of a good life rather than a "capstone," a celebration of the good life already achieved.

Perhaps the most important aspect of *Marriage-Go-Round* is its discussion of religion. Cherlin suggests that the "relationship-based, self-oriented meaning" of marriage delineated in the Massachusetts Supreme Court decision instituting gay marriage can also be found in the megachurch—bedfellows make strange bedfellows! He argues that American Christianity (even Roman Catholicism) emphasizes self-development over social role: We're "not a secular society but rather a questing one in which individuals have searched, sometimes again and again, for the kind of spirituality and family ties that fit their needs."

To discourage all spiritual seeking would be to discourage the pursuit of *truth*; and yet it's worth considering whether American marriages would be stronger if American churches placed more emphasis on social role and sacrifice than on self-expression and personal development.

The family that prays together, stays together? That depends on what they're praying. ♦

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Shades of James

A ghost story with a postmodern twist.

BY THOMAS JOHNSON

The best praise that can be given to Audrey Niffenegger's first full-length novel since her debut, *The Time Traveler's Wife* (2003), is the same as the greatest criticism that can be made of it: It tries to do a great many things within and without the conventional boundaries of the supernatural genre, to which it belongs.

Her Fearful Symmetry
A Novel
by Audrey Niffenegger
Scribner, 416 pp., $26.99

Niffenegger has written a ghost story that, like many others, features an eerie location and subtly manipulative relationships complicated by paranormal intrusion. While these tropes might have seemed stale in the hands of another writer, Niffenegger skillfully revitalizes them.

She also appears determined, paradoxically, to twist the genre's status quo while adhering to it. She attempts to provide the reader with a level of insight into the psyche of her central ghostly character—the likes of which her literary predecessors sometimes avoid—while struggling to maintain a shroud of mystery around the past actions of that ghost, as if hoping to tantalize the reader in the fashion of those predecessors. These goals, while admirable, are difficult to reconcile, and Niffenegger's attempts to do so through the employment of dishonest narrative tactics mar what is otherwise a powerful cautionary tale.

Symmetry submerges the reader in an atmosphere of gloom from its opening pages, in which the ghost-to-be Elspeth Noblin succumbs to leukemia, leaving behind a mourning lover, Robert—a tour-guide at London's Highgate Cemetery—a twin sister Edie, and a pair of 20-year-old twin nieces, Julia and Valentina. Though Elspeth has been estranged from Edie following a conflict 20 years prior, she bequeaths her flat, adjacent to the cemetery, to Julia and Valentina. They leave their Chicago home: Julia eager to experience London culture, Valentina nervous at the prospect of living on another continent and near a cemetery.

"[I]t's . . . like Henry James," she says.

This postmodern awareness (that Valentina and other characters possess) of the kind of story they are living out leads to a number of tongue-in-cheek cultural references that provide a contrast to *Symmetry*'s darkest moments—although the humor is never so obtrusive as to shatter the suspension of disbelief. At the same time, the characters' close proximity to Highgate Cemetery—burial place of Karl Marx and George Eliot, among others—and coldly elegant gravestones and mausoleums infuse the plot with a sense of wistfulness for a past age, strengthening the somber atmosphere in the aftermath of Elspeth's death.

Elspeth herself, however, is frustrated by her ghostly existence and desperately wants to reunite with Robert, who takes up with Valentina in her absence. Valentina, meanwhile, is anxious to escape from Julia's controlling grasp, a circumstance that Elspeth is increasingly willing to take advantage of. While these various struggles are occasionally melodramatic, Niffenegger smartly includes a subplot concerning Elspeth's neighbor Robert, an obsessive-compulsive whose long-distance relationship with his wife provides a calming contrast to the tumultuous associations among the main characters.

Yet even those bonds contain a measure of joy along with heartache. Julia and Valentina's relationship encapsulates this balance, oscillating between mutual affection and mutual resentment. Gradually, Niffenegger establishes these twins as characters in their own right, and as she does, the intimacy between them becomes as much a source of concern for the reader as a source of comfort. Julia is revealed to have an inordinate amount of control over her sister, who would have preferred to stay in college and establish her own identity. Julia is also largely motivated by a wish to protect Valentina, whose internal organs suffer from her being a "mirror twin," causing asthma and an irregular heartbeat. She is both admirable and maddening in the way that well-intentioned micromanagers can be.

Valentina is arguably more likeable than Julia: Her primal longing for independence easily earns sympathy. But the avenues that she eventually pursues in hope of achieving that independence diminish her likeability—and the believability of the plot. Though Niffenegger hints at an underlying depression as the motivation for Valentina's later actions, they seem slightly forced, as if the author had decided to disregard the plausibility of the character to heighten the dramatic stakes of the story.

Niffenegger also chooses drama over narrative honesty in her depiction of Elspeth. Elspeth holds a secret throughout *Her Fearful Symmetry*, which is alluded to in her thoughts but never fully elaborated on until the climax. That secret, once revealed, isn't particularly surprising but by its very nature should have a greater impact on Elspeth's inner monologue.

Even with this fault, however, *Her Fearful Symmetry* is an affecting read. Each major relationship is a microcosm of the best and worst that love and loving can bring to any person. This emotional resonance, combined with the atmosphere of Victorian spookiness that pervades it, secures its status as a fine ghost story. ♦

Thomas Johnson, an undergraduate at Loyola College, was an intern at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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Beat Generation

The same old routines, over and over.

BY ZACH MUNSON

Hmm. Where to begin. Paul Krassner—dedicated leftist, cofounder of the Yippies, pal to Lenny Bruce, comedian, *Huffington Post* blogger, pot smoker—has written what, I suppose, can technically be defined as a book. *Who's to Say What's Obscene?* has a front and back cover, with 240 pages in-between. It is bound. It bears the name of a publishing house. And yet, despite these trappings, it is not, really, a book.

Who's to Say What's Obscene?
Politics, Culture and Comedy in America Today
by Paul Krassner
City Lights, 240 pp., $16.95

So . . . what is it? Perhaps we can best define it by what it attempts to be. First and foremost, it attempts to be funny. And it is—though, perhaps, not in the way intended. The foreword by Arianna Huffington seems a logical place to begin.

She informs us that when she started *Huffington Post* Krassner was "just what the blog doctor ordered." American humor had lost its "bite," but Krassner has been "tilling the comedy soil and planting subversive seeds" with his "incendiary journalism" carried on in the "savory tradition" of Jonathan Swift, leading to a "bumper crop of satire," including Tina Fey's "comedy mugging" of Sarah Palin, some cartoon comedy that "draw[s] blood," and Doonesbury—yes, Doonesbury—regularly delivering a "knockout punch."

Pow! Munch! Mix! Metaphor! According to Huffington, Krassner defines his job as merely altering reality, which she insists he has done by inspiring John Cusack—yes, John Cusack—to make a reality-altering movie about the Iraq war called, uh, *War, Inc*. I think. Not sure. Never heard of it. As Huffington herself might say, it is from this alloy of confusion and grandiosity that Krassner himself forges the comic brew he will use to build his satire-house, or book, or thingy.

And really, it is just a kind of thingy. It's very ranty, but it's not a polemic: That would require fidelity to an ideology, and perhaps some semblance of coherence.

Krassner opens with a tirade about how President Obama is not prosecuting the crimes of the Bush administration forcefully enough, then quotes Tom Hayden, complaining that the budget for the Iraq war is more than that of the National Endowment for the Arts, then quotes someone writing about the auto bailout, then quotes a cartoon about corporate bonuses, then defends Ron Paul and Bob Barr, criticizes Dick Cheney, mentions breast feeding, says that we're being repressed, mocks late-night comedians for being too sarcastic, complains that a Boz Scaggs concert was cancelled one night because someone sent a letter with what might have been anthrax to the theater, and informs the reader that "people don't like to be lectured at."

And this is just a survey of the first seven pages.

Ostensibly, the subject of *Who's to Say* is the hypocrisy of our society's attempts to define obscenity. In a blurb on the back cover, the *New York Times* asserts that Paul Krassner is "an expert at ferreting out hypocrisy and absurdism from the more solemn crannies of American culture." And it's true! Krassner dares to mine such "solemn crannies" as gay pornography, Michael Phelps' bong hits, and the term MILF.

Really, Krassner just lists quotes and events, and never ties them together with any particular clarity or emphasis on any point. And in between the ranting (I guess this is the ferreting?) he directs most of his energy toward cursing George W. Bush, advocating smoking pot, and reminiscing about the many people with whom he dropped acid. He does quite a lot of this and, actually, *Who's to Say* is something of an exercise in hippie-dippie name-dropping: Allen Ginsberg, Abbie Hoffman, Ken Kesey, Timothy Leary, etc.

Now, are we supposed to connect the dots to see how hypocritical and obscene we are here in the good old U.S. of A? To understand our slavery to lifeless bourgeois normality, to shake off our shackles and begin life anew? To live like, say, Paul Krassner—unencumbered by petty concepts of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, proper and profane?

In a telling passage he transcribes a memorial forum he participated in for Allen Ginsberg. The discussion turned to Ginsberg's self-proclaimed pedophilia, and after considering how interesting—not predatory or wrong, but *interesting*—he found it, Krassner quotes the actor Peter Coyote:

> It's just so funny. I mean, as a father of two kids, I'm *repulsed* by the idea of pedophilia, but you know, by the same token, it's Allen.

It is true that many of Paul Krassner's ideas about drugs, sex, and obscenity have been assimilated into the mainstream culture in the last four decades, and yet he remains a fringe figure, relegated to the fever swamps of left-wing bloggerdom. When he asks *Who's to Say What's Obscene?*, what he means to say, as Peter Coyote suggests, is that nothing is. Most people, fortunately, still disagree. ♦

Zach Munson is a writer and comedian.

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"Republican Robert F. McDonnell's 20-year-old master's thesis continued to consume the Virginia governor's race Tuesday, with Democrat R. Creigh Deeds presenting the paper as his opponent's true beliefs and McDonnell insisting otherwise. . . . Deeds has been highlighting McDonnell's conservatism for months, but his campaign pounced on the thesis as further evidence of it after details from the paper were first published Sunday in The Washington Post."

—Washington Post, *September 2, 2009*

DAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2009

Prices may vary in areas outside metropolitan Washington, for at least as long as we're in business.

Post Runs Another Story About Its McDonnell Story

Stories to run until 'controversy' takes on life of its own, sources say

By ANITA KUMAR
Washington Post Staff Writer

Three days after publishing a story in hopes of generating a controversy over a master's thesis written 20 years ago by GOP gubernatorial hopeful Bob McDonnell, The Washington Post will publish another story today about the reaction to its original story, The Washington Post has learned. Today's story is intended to create the impression that the original story had created a controversy, sources tell The Post. It follows two stories The Post published yesterday about its original story.

"There was the big front-pager three days ago, two follow-ups the next day, two reax stories yesterday, two more reax stories today, plus a sidebar – if we can't generate a full-blown, phoney baloney campaign scandal out of that, then we should just pack up the newsroom, turn out the lights, and let the bloggers take the whole shooting match," said one source, who asked to remain anonymous so readers might think he was an objective authority who doesn't work in the cubicle next to mine.

The Post's strenuous efforts to keep the McDonnell story alive comes in the wake of a near-total lack of interest on the part of Virginian voters in what the paper called its "revelations." As a result, Post reporters and headline writers have been forced to overwrite in the absence of a genuine controversy.

Worldwide Photos

Bob McDonnell, looking worried Tuesday.

One headline, for example, said the race "erupted" 48 hours after the first article appeared. The text of the article, by contrast, said the race "ignited." Virginia voters were quick to point out that the race had done neither.

"Did the copy desk mix metaphors in describing something that wasn't happening? Yes," said one source close to the paper. "Is that a risk that a fearless newsgathering organization is willing to run if it's going to take down a candidate that none of its employees would vote for? You bet it is."

The paper's editors and reporters have evidently been willing to take other risks. Three days after the original story, another Post headline described the GOP hopeful trying to "salvage women's votes." The article took care not to cite evidence that the GOP hopeful had lost any women's votes in the first place.

While dismayed by public indifference, longtime observers took comfort in the fact that The Post's normally stuffy editorial page editors were more than happy to help the effort.

"If you break an unsurprising story like the McDonnell thesis and want to keep it on life-support, you've simply got to get the bow-tie boys to follow up with an editorial," said one newsroom veteran. Guidelines issued by the American Association of Newspaper Editors require that such an editorial point out that the original story "raises troubling questions" to which the "voters deserve answers."

The paper remains divided on where to go next in its ongoing efforts, according to one source who sits next to the kitchen.

"Unless Smoky the Bear lights a fire under the [bottoms] of Virginia voters, the paper is going to have to do a poll," said the source. "I can almost guarantee the results: 'Despite Apathy, Poll Shows Voter Concern Over McDonnell "Anti-woman" Thesis.' If they can't generate concern on their own, we'll give them concern."

See DISMAY BUILDING, *A5, Col.1*

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